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HOW CLOSE DID THE WORLD COME TO ARMAGEDDON?

HISTORY MAGAZINE

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The merchants who profited from the 14th-century plague

PLUS

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WELCOME

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

JULY 2021

Every crisis brings opportunities. While many businesses have struggled or collapsed during the Covid-19 pandemic, others have been able to adapt and thrive in the changing economic landscape. It was just the same during the Black Death of the 14th century. Amid the great suffering and hardship, there were **merchants who took advantage of the chaos and disruption** to earn huge profits – to the horror of some of those around them. In this month's cover feature, on page 20, medieval historian Robert Blackmore explains how fortunes were made in the darkest of days. His piece is followed by an interview with Niall Ferguson (page 29), exploring how **societies have responded to pandemics and other catastrophes** over the millennia.

One catastrophe that thankfully didn't come to pass is a nuclear conflict between the USA and the Soviet Union. In the autumn of 1962, however, the prospect seemed very real as the **superpowers faced off in the waters surrounding Cuba**. In his article on page 58, Serhii Plokhy reveals quite how close the world came to armageddon.

Finally, I'm delighted to be welcoming a new columnist to the magazine this month. The historian, author and broadcaster **Emma Dabiri is taking over from David Olusoga** as the author of *Hidden Histories*, and she begins with the life of a formerly enslaved woman in the American South who wrote a powerful account of her struggle for freedom (page 16). It's a fascinating story and one that, as the column's title suggests, deserves to be better known today.

Rob Attar
Editor

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Alice Roberts
It's extraordinary how much we can tell about prehistoric Britain, with only a few pieces of evidence to draw on. I look at the very first burial found in Britain, the Red Lady of Paviland, which takes us back more than 30,000 years.
Alice reveals the secrets we can learn about prehistoric Britain through burial sites on page 78

Robert Blackmore
Whether lived through or studied, with the 14th century you cannot avoid the Black Death. Though a human catastrophe, its economic effects were unpredictable, and I found that merchants could be winners as well as losers.
Robert investigates the merchants who made a fortune during the deadly medieval epidemic on page 20

Souvik Naha
As a historian of modern south Asia and the British empire, I use cricket as a lens for understanding themes of race, gender, nationalism, politics and diplomacy in the 20th century.
Souvik explores how cricket was used by colonialists as a tool of empire on page 50

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COVER: LOADING GOODS ON TO A SHIP, FROM A 14TH-CENTURY ITALIAN MANUSCRIPT: BRIDGEMAN. BACKGROUND: DREAMSTIME. SKULL OF 'CHEDDAR MAN': ALAMY. THIS PAGE: STEVE SAYERS, DAVE STEVENS

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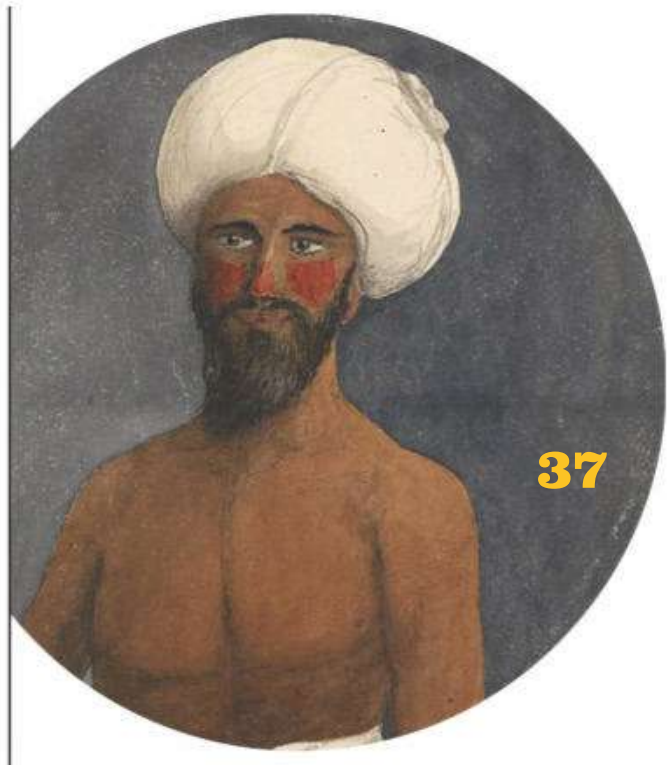

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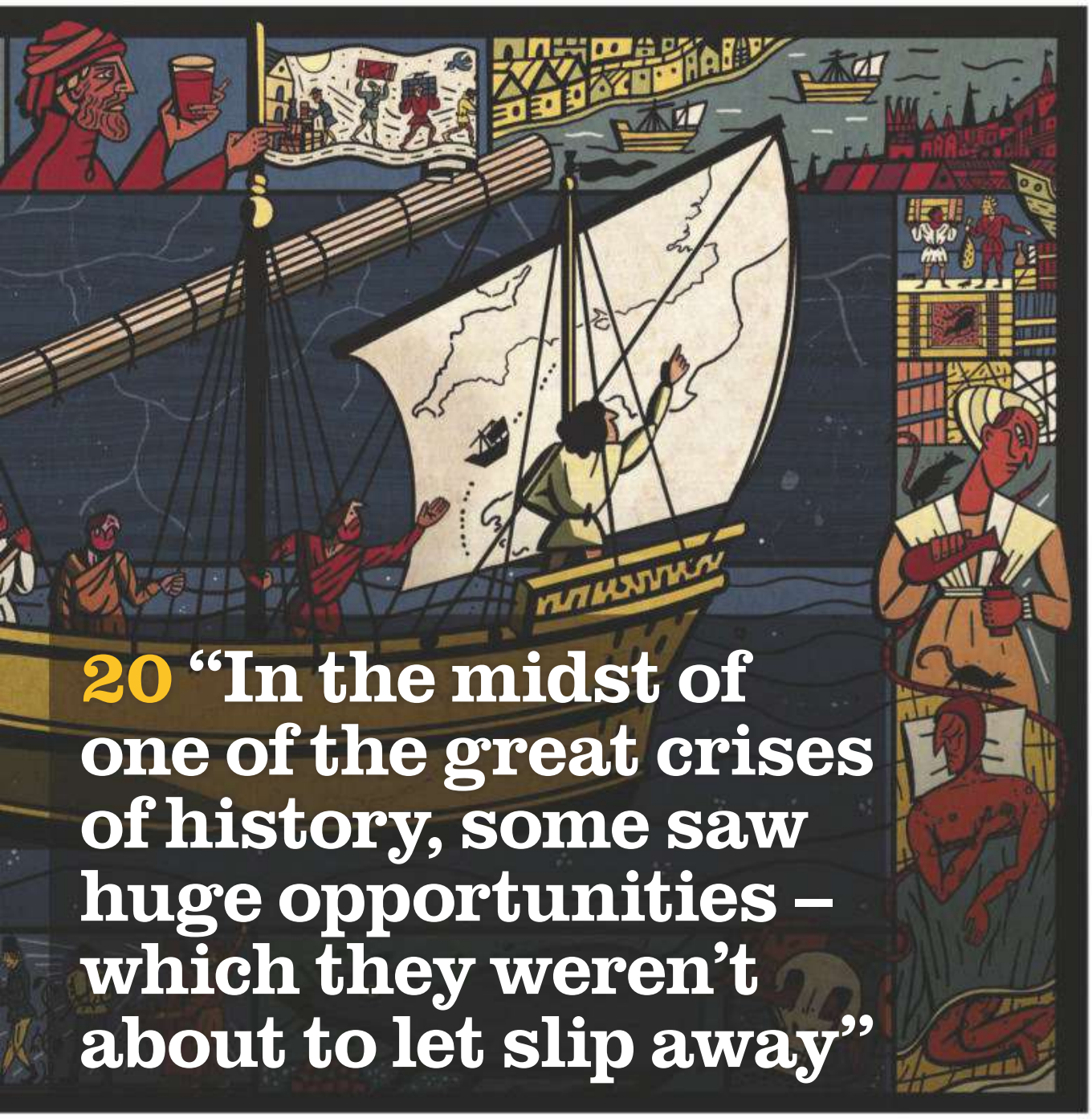

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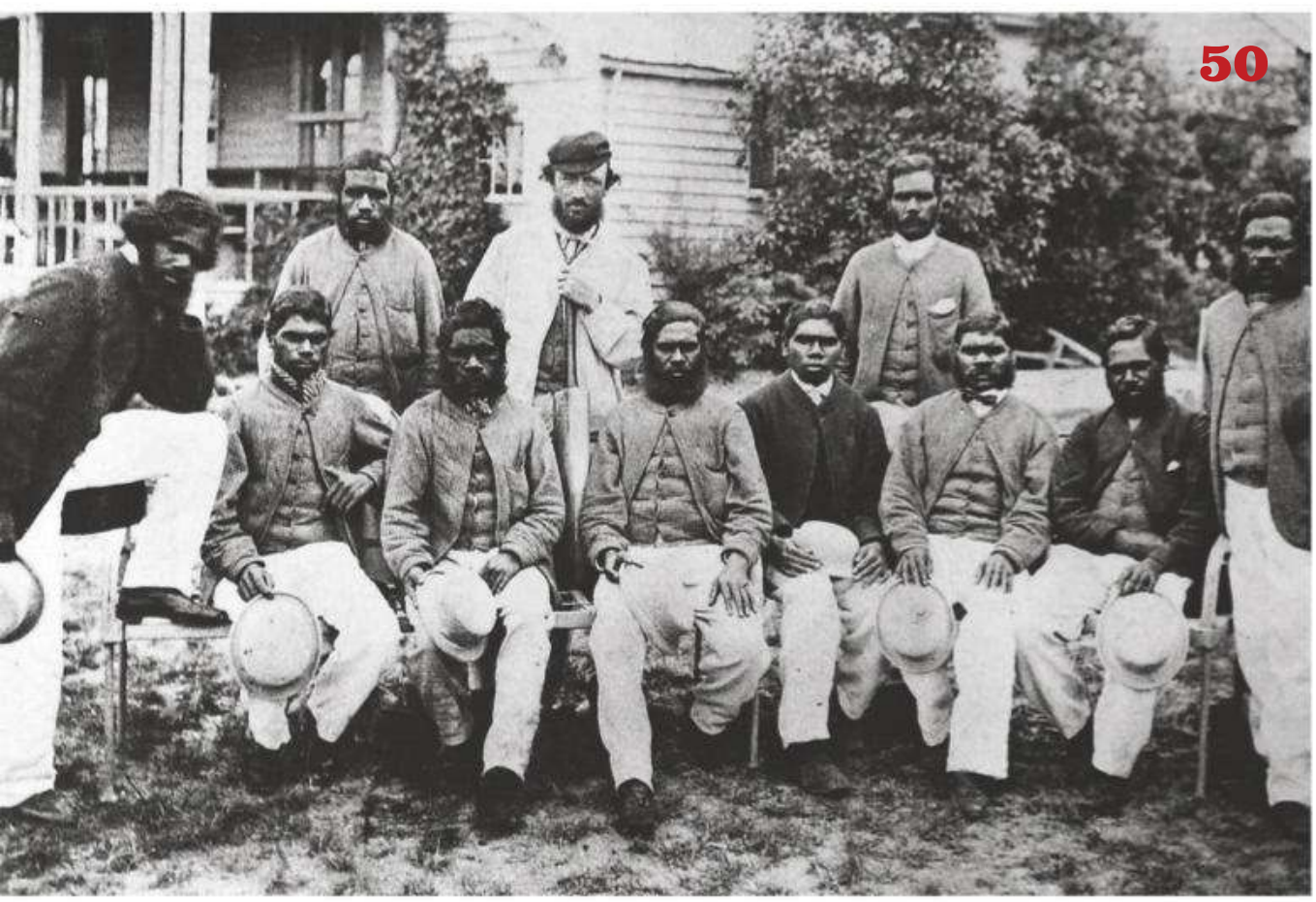
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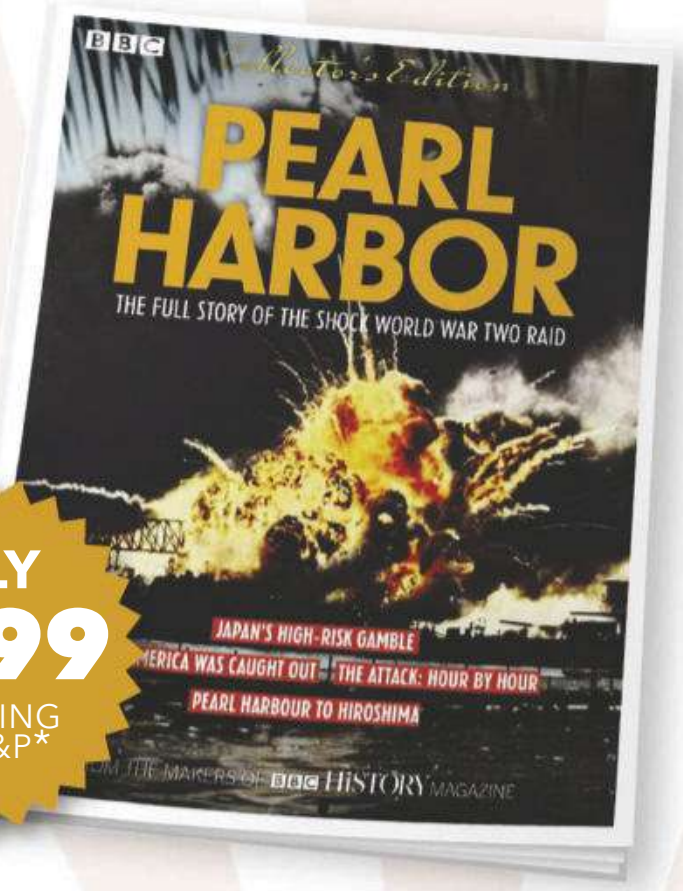
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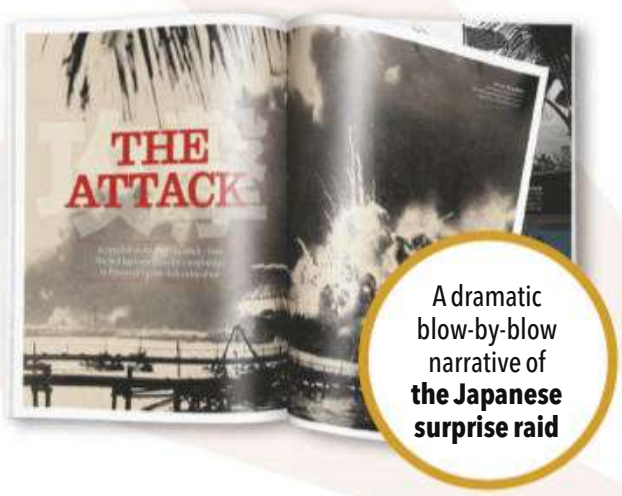

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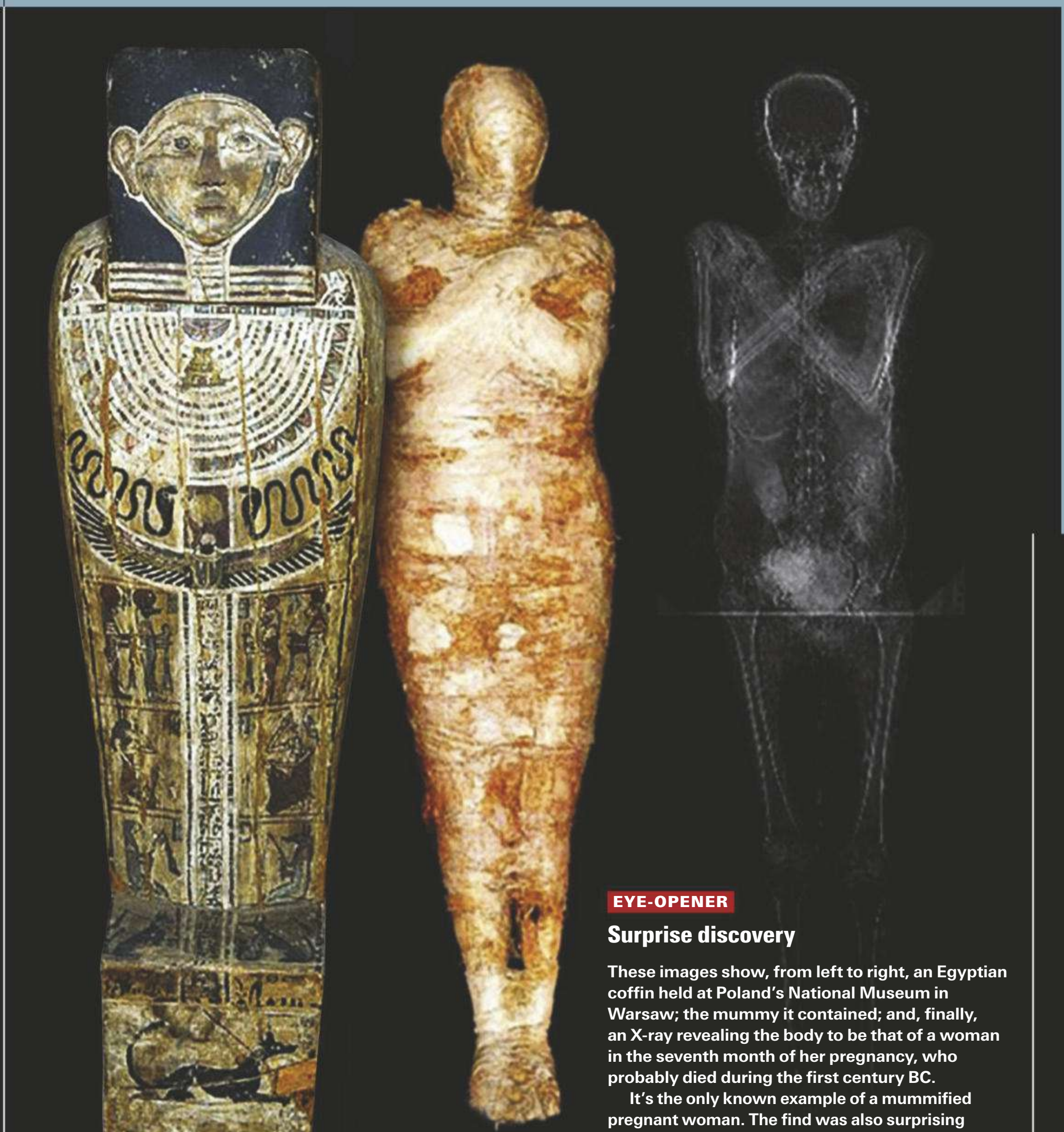

WARSAW MUMMY PROJECT

EYE-OPENER

Surprise discovery

These images show, from left to right, an Egyptian coffin held at Poland's National Museum in Warsaw; the mummy it contained; and, finally, an X-ray revealing the body to be that of a woman in the seventh month of her pregnancy, who probably died during the first century BC.

It's the only known example of a mummified pregnant woman. The find was also surprising because an inscription on the coffin holding the mummy named its occupant as a male priest.

Have a story? Please email Matt Elton at matt.elton@immediate.co.uk

TALKING POINTS
Class dismissed

News that some UK universities are to cut their history degrees in favour of more "vocational" courses sparked a strong online reaction. **ANNA WHITELOCK** charted Twitter's response

"Studying history should not be only for the elite, say academics." So read the headline of a recent article in *The Guardian,* as several historians responded to the news that two universities – Aston in Birmingham and London South Bank – would be cutting their history degrees. The institutions have faced government pressure to focus on perceived "high-value" STEM [science, technology, engineering and maths] and vocational courses that typically produce graduates who earn higher salaries. Moreover, with the removal of restrictions on student numbers at British universities, Russell Group institutions at the elite end of the sector are taking on more and more students, leaving some younger universities struggling to recruit.

As might be expected, Twitter users had much to say on the subject. Head of history at Aston University, **Ilaria Scaglia** (@IlariaScaglia1), tweeted: "I will stand up for the exceptional commitment to teaching and scholarship I witnessed in unexpected, underfunded places." **Rachel Willie** (@RachelJWillie) also drew on personal experience, writing: "I've worked at seven universities and across the sector. I've found the most innovative approaches to assessment, course delivery and module design were often found in 'non-elite' universities, [which also had] more firmly research-led teaching and teaching-led research."

Join the debate at **twitter.com/historyextra**

Peter O'Hanlon (@peteohanlon) noted that "one of the key selling points for my daughter when she chose her degree, other than a love of history, was the premise that the benefit of a history degree was the application of critical thinking it engenders. A government that wants a supine population fears critical thought." **Sunder Katwala** (@sundersays) added that "all elite debate in media and politics much underestimates the chance to learn, and the appetite for education [about] history". The idea of a public passion for learning about the past was echoed by **Simply Sal** (@SalSimply), who wrote that "I was a single mum, living in a bedsit, when I started my history degree at UEA. It saved me from a pit of despair."

A spokesperson from London South Bank University said: "Decisions around the courses we offer to prospective students are taken very carefully. We consider how they provide students with the skills they need to enter high-quality jobs or further study, previous enrolment levels and how they support social mobility and student success." And an Aston University spokesperson stated: "This is an open and ongoing consultation, and we are in discussions with potentially impacted colleagues and UCU [University and College Union]. We are unable to comment further at this stage." H

ILLUSTRATION BY **IAN MORRIS**

Anna Whitelock is professor of the history of monarchy and head of the history department at Royal Holloway University of London

A section of the Isaiah Scroll, which has been studied afresh using the latest artificial intelligence techniques

ARCHAEOLOGY

Dead Sea Scroll authorship probed

Since their initial discovery in 1947 in caves in what's now Israeli-occupied West Bank, the Dead Sea Scrolls – a set of ancient religious manuscripts, mostly in Hebrew and including the oldest known version of the Bible – have been a source of fascination. Now, the authors of a new study have employed artificial intelligence in an attempt to learn more about the scrolls' origins.

The team analysed digitised images of the "Isaiah Scroll", the longest of approximately 950 known manuscripts. An algorithm was devised to separate the shape of the ink from its background and detect tiny differences across more than 5,000 instances of a single character – aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This technique was used to query a belief that, based on the high degree of uniformity across the document's characters, the manuscript was the work of a single author.

The results of the study instead suggest that two authors may have worked on the scroll, albeit with nearly identical handwriting – perhaps the result of a deliberate effort to adopt the same style, or because both scribes had received the same training. The theory could potentially be supported by a change in material halfway through the scroll, where a second sheet of leather or papyrus has been attached to the first. However, the researchers, based at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, observed that the minuscule variations in character composition may have been a result of other factors such as a change in pen or nib. H

GETTY IMAGES

HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**

Errant finger reunited with statue of Constantine

A bronze hand of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great has been reunited with its missing index finger after more than 500 years apart. Having been erroneously labelled as a toe, the digit was found in the Louvre in 2018 and has now been reattached to the hand held at Rome's Capitoline Museums. It's thought that the finger became separated from its hand, made in the fourth century AD, before the 16th century.

The fourth-century statue of Constantine, before its index finger was restored. Many pieces are still missing

Mary Rose "had multi-ethnic crew", research suggests

The crew of Henry VIII's warship *Mary Rose* was more ethnically diverse than previously thought, a new study indicates.

The ship (pictured above), which sank in 1545, was raised in 1982 and the remains of 179 of its crew have been retrieved. The new research, undertaken by a team from Cardiff University, the Mary Rose Trust and the British Geological Survey, analysed the teeth of eight of the best-preserved skeletons, revealing clues about the origin of the food and drink they consumed in their early lives. Of the eight individuals studied, five were almost certainly from Britain, while the other three may have come from the Iberian peninsula, north Africa and the Mediterranean coast of southern Europe.

"The variety and number of personal artefacts recovered which were clearly not of English manufacture made us wonder whether some of the crew were foreign by birth," said Dr Alexzandra Hildred, from the Mary Rose Trust. "However, we never expected this diversity to be so rich."

Hillside giant "may be Saxon"

A club-wielding figure carved into a Dorset hillside may have been created in the late Saxon period, new analysis suggests. Soil samples from the Cerne Abbas Giant (above) were examined to determine when they were last exposed to sunlight. The results indicate that the giant was created between AD 700 and 1100. This is surprising because the earliest documented record of the giant dates to 1694. One theory is that the figure was created before 1100, neglected for several centuries and then rediscovered.

Swedish surveyor stumbles upon Bronze Age treasures

A cartographer drawing a map of a forest in western Sweden for his local orienteering club discovered a trove of about 50 artefacts believed to be at least 2,500 years old. The well-preserved haul (pictured above), including necklaces, bracelets and a rod used to spur on horses, was found on the forest floor, where it was probably left as an offering to the gods. It's thought that the treasure was exposed recently after animals disturbed earth that covered the artefacts.

Siege site excavation reveals Civil War artefacts

Researchers at the Essex site of a Civil War siege have discovered items including a stirrup, a horseshoe and a shoe buckle. After the royalist stronghold of Colchester was surrounded by parliamentarian forces in June 1648, starving royalist cavalry tried to flee across the river Colne, where the artefacts were found. The town eventually fell in August, bringing to an end the second phase of the Civil War. H

This shoe buckle was among the finds made at a Civil War site near Colchester

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MICHAEL WOOD ON...
LIVING HISTORY IN THE AMERICAS

"Traditions constitute the invisible, under-the-surface flow of history"

This summer marks 500 years since the conquest of the Aztecs' great capital Tenochtitlan by Spanish forces under Hernán Cortés. The 18th-century economist Adam Smith called the "discovery" of the New World and its aftermath one of the greatest events in human history. Maybe he was right. Never before had a whole continent been taken over, its native peoples dispossessed and enslaved, killed or died of disease; its natural resources plundered and extracted. So much flowed from this conquest: European colonisation, the Atlantic slave trade, the shifting of the balance of world history. For the Aztecs, Maya, Inca and thousands of other native American peoples, it was cataclysmic – and still is. Just look at what's happening in the Amazon.

As the Spanish missionary Bartolomé de las Casas wrote in 1542: "Everything that has happened since the marvellous discovery of the Americas has been so extraordinary that the whole story remains incredible to anyone who has not experienced it first hand." Indeed, as I saw 20 years ago when following in the footsteps of the Conquistadors, some of the tales are almost beyond belief: Cortés's conquest of Mexico; Francisco Pizarro in Peru; his brother Gonzalo's ill-fated attempt to find the fabled El Dorado, which led Francisco de Orellana to sail the length of the Amazon in a hastily constructed boat. There's the jaw-dropping tale of Almagro's epic expedition to Chile, and de Soto in Florida and the Mississippi valley – a 16th-century *Heart of Darkness*. And what of Cabeza de Vaca's eight-year odyssey from Florida to the Pacific, a "naked unaccommodated man" living with the natives?

Almost everywhere I travelled 20 years ago, though, I also encountered living links with the past: traditions, stories, rituals, songs. One day, while following one of the surviving sacred lines emanating from the ancient Peruvian city of Cusco, I came across an abandoned hacienda, once a palace of the great ruler Pachacuti Inca, where a sacred cave was still tended by the locals. There the locals introduced me to a descendant of the Inca who lived nearby. A tough, stocky man with the bearing of a Chinese emperor, he told of how his forebears survived, intermarrying with the Spanish after the 1530s, holding onto property and land where they could.

"I am descended on my mother's side from Mayta Capac," he said, "of the same lineage as Huayna Capac [the last great Inca ruler, who died during the great plague on the eve of Pizarro's arrival].

"The name of the valley is Pumamarca, 'place of pumas'," he continued, "but the house is called *t'ika marca* – 'place of flowers'. As children we were told that flowers were grown there for Inca royal ceremonies in Cusco, and especially for the *coyas* – the queens. The mummy of Pachacuti's queen was kept there, and brought out to greet the sun every year on the big festivals. My father said she is still there."

There's a parable for our 21st century, when ancient memories and customs are being lost everywhere. These living links are still preserved among the Nahuas in Mexico, by the Quechua speakers of the Andes, and by so many other indigenous peoples across the Americas. Such connections are the real fabric of history: invisible strands weaving together – like the richly figured cloths still so important in the cultures of the High Andes – the pattern of human lives and landscapes, ritual and belief, the agrarian seasonal rhythms, the old customs of land tenure and authority. These traditions and tales constitute the invisible, under-the-surface flow of history, beneath "great events" such as the rise and fall of empires.

Viewed against this long-term legacy, conquests are perhaps only ever partial and superficial. In the memory of people like Mr Mayta, one may see how, even after such cataclysms, connections are maintained and handed down not as mere anecdote but as a body of active knowledge. Since globalisation took hold – globalisation not only of capitalism and technology but of mentalities – these connections are being severed. But that takes time – and perhaps, in the manner of a genetic code, those memories never quite go away. H

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series and his books include *Conquistadors* (BBC, 2000). His twitter handle is @mayavision

BBC

ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

ANNIVERSARIES

DOMINIC SANDBROOK highlights events that took place in July in history

21 JULY 356 BC

The Temple of Artemis burns to the ground

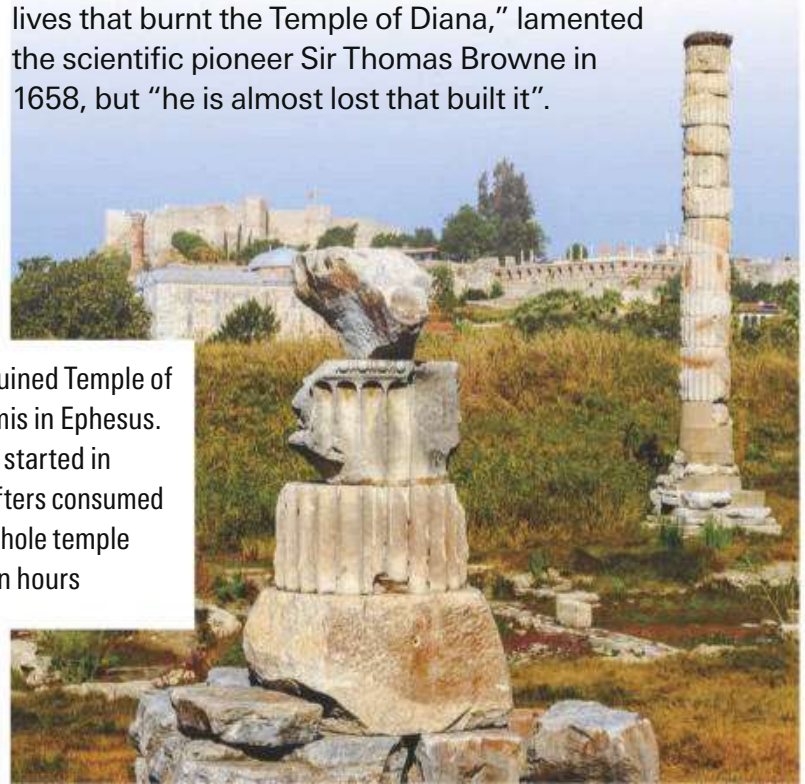
An arsonist desperate for eternal fame sets one of the seven wonders of the world ablaze

For the people of Ephesus, the Temple of Artemis was a source of immense local pride. Reportedly built by the extraordinarily rich king Croesus, it was said to have been made largely of marble, boasting huge pillars. In the centre stood the colossal figure of Artemis the huntress, made from blackened wood.

For visitors, there were few better attractions in the Greek world. Pilgrims brought jewellery as a gift for the goddess; refugees came to seek sanctuary. No wonder the Greeks ranked it as one of the seven wonders of the world.

But on 21 July 356, disaster struck. The man responsible was one Herostratus, who may have been an outsider or a slave. Supposedly hungry for fame, he decided to set the temple's wooden rafters alight, "so that through the destruction of this most beautiful building his name might be spread through the whole world".

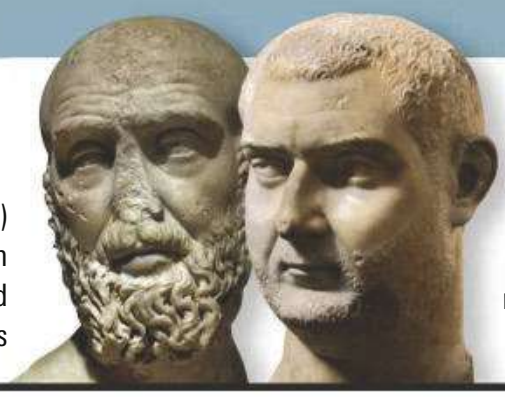
The result was a tragedy. In the space of a single night, the temple was consumed by flames, and by morning it was a blackened, broken ruin. Herostratus was arrested immediately, tortured and executed. The people of Ephesus also passed a law banning any mention of his name, with the death penalty for transgressors. It didn't work, though. "Herostratus lives that burnt the Temple of Diana," lamented the scientific pioneer Sir Thomas Browne in 1658, but "he is almost lost that built it".



The ruined Temple of Artemis in Ephesus. A fire started in its rafters consumed the whole temple within hours

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

Soldiers of the Chinese 29th Army set up defences in Beijing, days after the Marco Polo Bridge incident. The exchange of gunfire at the bridge heralded the start of the Sino-Japanese War



Busts of Pupienus (left) and Balbinus (right). Both emperors were murdered by rebel Praetorian Guards

29 JULY 238

After a joint reign lasting just three months, the elderly **Roman emperors Pupienus and Balbinus** are cornered in the imperial palace by mutinous Praetorian Guards, who drag them to their barracks before **hacking them to death**.

7 JULY 1937

The Sino-Japanese War breaks out

Rising tensions bubble over into violence as shots ring out at the Marco Polo Bridge

The Marco Polo Bridge stands over the river Yongding, not far from the centre of modern Beijing. Completed in 1192, with 11 granite arches, it caught the Italian traveller's eye a century later. "A very fine stone bridge," he called it. "So fine indeed, that it has very few equals in the world."

Hundreds of years later, the rebuilt bridge stood at the centre of one of the most momentous incidents in Sino-Japanese history. Since the turn of the 20th century, the Japanese had been allowed to station thousands of troops in China, ostensibly to guard their vital railway links. But their numbers had swollen dramatically, and in the summer of 1937 Japan's generals were itching to launch an all-out conquest of the Chinese mainland.

The flashpoint came on 7 July, after the Japanese troops were returning to barracks outside the city of Wanping. Exactly what happened remain murky, but it seems that a Japanese soldier went missing, his commanders demanded permission to search Wanping and the Chinese said no.

As the night wore on, tempers began to fray. Both sides called for reinforcements, and at dawn the following morning the local Chinese troops opened fire on the Japanese soldiers at the Marco Polo Bridge. Was it planned? Or was it an accident? We will probably never know.

Eventually the two sides agreed a ceasefire, and it seemed the conflict would blow over. But news of the fighting had spread. In Tokyo, already sweltering with war fever, Japan's government ordered more troops to the area. The Chinese government, too, was itching for a scrap. As its military leader, Chiang Kai-shek, wrote in his diary, they had given in too often to the "dwarf bandits" from Japan. "This is the time," he added, "for the determination to fight."

In the next few weeks the roads to Beijing echoed to the stamp of marching feet. The war had begun. By the time it was over, some 20 million people would be dead.

The Great Choral Synagogue in Riga in the 1930s. It would later become the site of a massacre

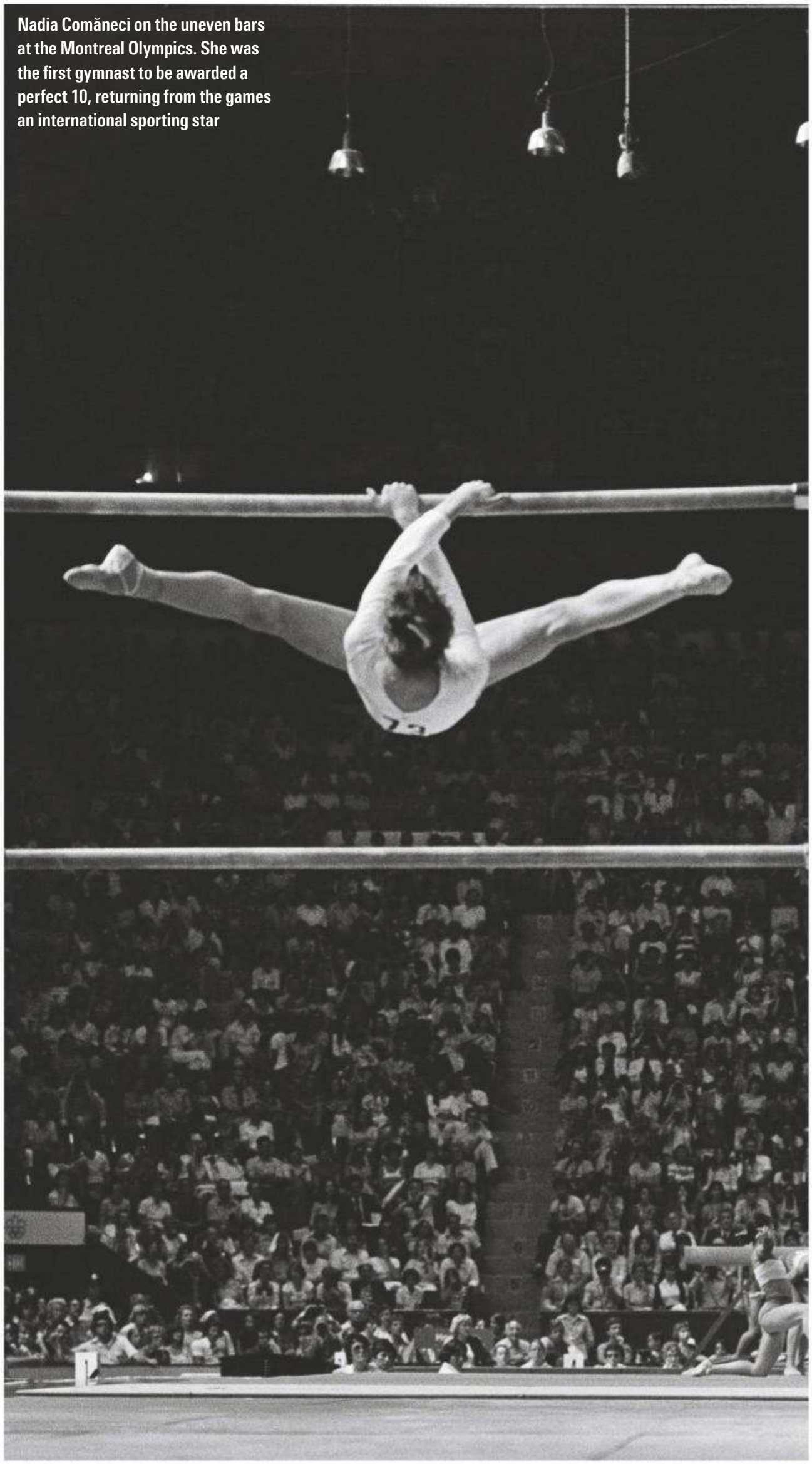
4 JULY 1941

During the German occupation of Latvia, **the Great Choral Synagogue in Riga is set on fire**, destroying the holy scrolls and killing dozens – perhaps even hundreds – of Jewish refugees who have taken sanctuary in the basement.

18 JULY 1976

Nadia Comăneci scores a perfect 10

The Olympic gymnast makes history with her faultless routine



Nadia Comăneci on the uneven bars at the Montreal Olympics. She was the first gymnast to be awarded a perfect 10, returning from the games an international sporting star

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

It was the second day of the Montreal Olympics – a sporting carnival that was to become notorious for massive overspending and a financial disaster that took the city three decades to redress. But as a tiny, elfin figure took to the stage, all talk of dollars and cents was forgotten.

Hailing from the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains in Romania, Nadia Comăneci was only 14 years old, but already she was a star. A year earlier she had won gymnastics gold at the European championships in Norway, and in March 1976 she electrified the crowds at Madison Square Garden, New York.

For the communists, she was a Cold War weapon, a walking advert of their regime – whether she liked it or not. And for western journalists, too, she seemed irresistible. "Her lips are faint and thin, lost beneath dusky, soulful eyes that caused many of those who studied her to imagine that she must be some brooding, mysterious Carpathian princess," gushed *Sports Illustrated*.

Even so, few people anticipated what was coming. Before the games began, the official timers, the Swiss firm Omega, had discussed introducing new scoreboards that could show four digits, allowing for a 10.00 perfect score. No point, said the organisers. What human being could achieve perfection?

The answer, of course, was Nadia Comăneci, winning the first ever perfect 10 for her routine on the uneven bars. The scoreboard flashed up "1.00", the nearest it could get to a 10. Then she did it again – and again, and again, six times in all.

Word spread quickly. "Her precision and daring in gymnastics have never been seen before in an Olympics," declared *Sports Illustrated*. "For the rare privilege of witnessing the birth of a legend, people splurged $100 on a $16 seat."

Returning home with three gold medals, Comăneci was not just a Romanian national hero. She was now an international superstar.

A 16th-century portrait which may depict Anne Askew, who was executed for her heretical beliefs

16 JULY 1546

Anne Askew is burned at the stake

A hidden cache of gunpowder saves the heretic from a tortuously slow death

Anne Askew was, by any standards, an extraordinary woman. Born near Grimsby in around 1521, she was a devout Protestant. As a young girl she would go to Lincoln Cathedral to discuss theology with the clergy – and none of them could ever beat her in an argument.

When Anne got married, her Catholic husband lost patience with her Bible-reading and threw her out. She moved to London and became involved with radical evangelical circles. But in the summer of 1546, she was arrested for heresy and taken to the Tower.

Here she underwent horrific torture, racked so hard that her bones popped from their sockets. Her torturers wanted evidence against the queen, Katherine Parr. But Anne refused to name names.

On 16 July, Anne was taken to Smithfield, to be burned as a heretic. Her body was now so broken that she could not stand unaided. Instead she lay slumped in a chair, which her guards tied to the stake.

It was a stifling day, and the crowd was restless. Some shouted that Anne was a good Christian, and scuffles broke out. Suddenly a clap of thunder tore the sky in two – the voice of God, some people cried. As if in answer, the bonfire burst into an explosion of its own.

When the smoke cleared, it was obvious what had happened. Somebody had hidden gunpowder under the wood, so that Anne's suffering would be soon over. H

Dominic Sandbrook's new series of history books for children, *Adventures in Time*, is now in bookshops, published by Particular

GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN

WHY WE SHOULD REMEMBER...

The launch of the **swimsuit that scandalised** the world

BY **ALISON TOPLIS**

Seventy-five years ago, on 5 July 1946, a Frenchman called Louis Réard unveiled a "bikini" at the Piscine Molitor, a Parisian swimming pool. Featuring a print of newspaper pages, the forerunner of today's string bikinis comprised four triangles. A consummate self-publicist, Réard invited the press to see his scandalous creation. It was worn by a showgirl, Micheline Bernardini, as apparently no "respectable" model would wear such a scant garment.

The bikini was launched four days after the Bikini Atoll nuclear tests began, and it was this event in the Pacific Ocean that dominated press coverage in Britain immediately afterwards, rather than the risqué fashion innovation of a Frenchman. "Bikini" thus had associations with nuclear explosions as well as a tropical paradise (its transliterated name means "surface of coconuts"). The tiny size of the atoll was reflected in the diminutive piece of clothing, which Réard later boasted could be pulled through a wedding ring.

> **"The bikini was modelled by a showgirl, as no 'respectable' model would wear such a garment"**

Of course, prior to 1946 women wore two-piece swimwear, most notably during the 1930s. Another Frenchman, Jacques Heim, had developed a two-piece bathing suit in 1932, calling it the "Atome", but this had had a low take-up. He relaunched this high-waisted version a month before Réard's unveiling, calling it the world's smallest bathing suit, but the paucity of fabric and the navel-baring novelty of Réard's bikini eventually came to dominate.

Initially, censure and disapproval led to the banning of the bikini on many public beaches including in Spain, France and Australia. And when the winner of the inaugural Miss World beauty contest, held in London in 1951, was crowned wearing a bikini, she received papal condemnation for donning the garment.

However, European and Hollywood film stars, such as Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe, did much to glamourise and gradually popularise the bikini's use by the late 1950s. As the clothing of choice of Bond girls and then *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit-issue cover stars from 1964 onwards, the bikini gained further allure.

Micheline Bernardini models Louis Réard's bikini at the garment's unveiling in July 1946. Although the bikini initially sparked controversy, it's now a worldwide wardrobe staple

Today it remains a contentious garment, summing up many contemporary concerns. These range from worry about damage to health caused by overexposure to the sun to ongoing religious and moral anxieties. There also continue to be debates about the problematic male gaze as well as around the limitations of the "aspirational" western female beauty standard of the "bikini body". H

Alison Toplis is a dress and textile historian. Her new book, *The Hidden History of the Smock Frock*, is out now from Bloomsbury Visual Arts

HIDDEN HISTORIES

EMMA DABIRI explores lesser-known stories from our past

"Jacobs' writing transports readers to the world of Southern slavery"

Emma Dabiri is an author and broadcaster, and teaching fellow at SOAS University of London. Her most recent book is *What White People Can Do Next: From Allyship to Coalition* (Penguin, 2021)

"No matter what the slave girl looks like, if she's dark, if she's light, if she's medium, if she's at all attractive, if she has beauty it is a curse, because the master will be after her… Even the little child will learn that if God has bestowed beauty on her, it will prove her greatest curse. Slavery is a cage of obscene birds."

This quote, from Harriet Jacobs' 1861 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, is emblematic of how her evocative style and relatable, contemporary voice transports readers to the intimate spaces of the world of Southern slavery. Yet for years, many people refused to believe that her book could be true, or that it could have been written by a woman of African descent. Indeed, the accepted academic opinion until the 1980s was that it was a fictional novel written by a white abolitionist.

I came across Jacobs' story by chance while researching advertisements about escaped slaves. Notices for women are not as common as those for men, and hers caught my eye: "$100 REWARD will be given for the apprehension and delivery of my Servant Girl HARRIET. She is a light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high."

Further digging revealed not only that Harriet eventually gained her freedom, but also that she became a tireless campaigner for black liberation. Her strength of will – which compelled this formerly enslaved woman to write herself into a historical record that would have gladly erased her – is apparent from a young age. As Harriet wrote: "My master had power and law on his side. I had a determined will. There is might in each."

In the hope of escaping the clutches of that master, Dr Norcom, young Harriet made a calculated gamble. At the age of 15 she met Samuel Tradwell Sawyer – a white lawyer aged around 30, from one of North Carolina's wealthiest families – who took an interest in her. Harriet's plan hinged on the fact that Sawyer was wealthier and more powerful than Norcom; she believed that if she had his baby, he might buy both her and her child. By the time she was 19, she had borne two children by Sawyer – yet they, too, were deemed to be Norcom's "possessions".

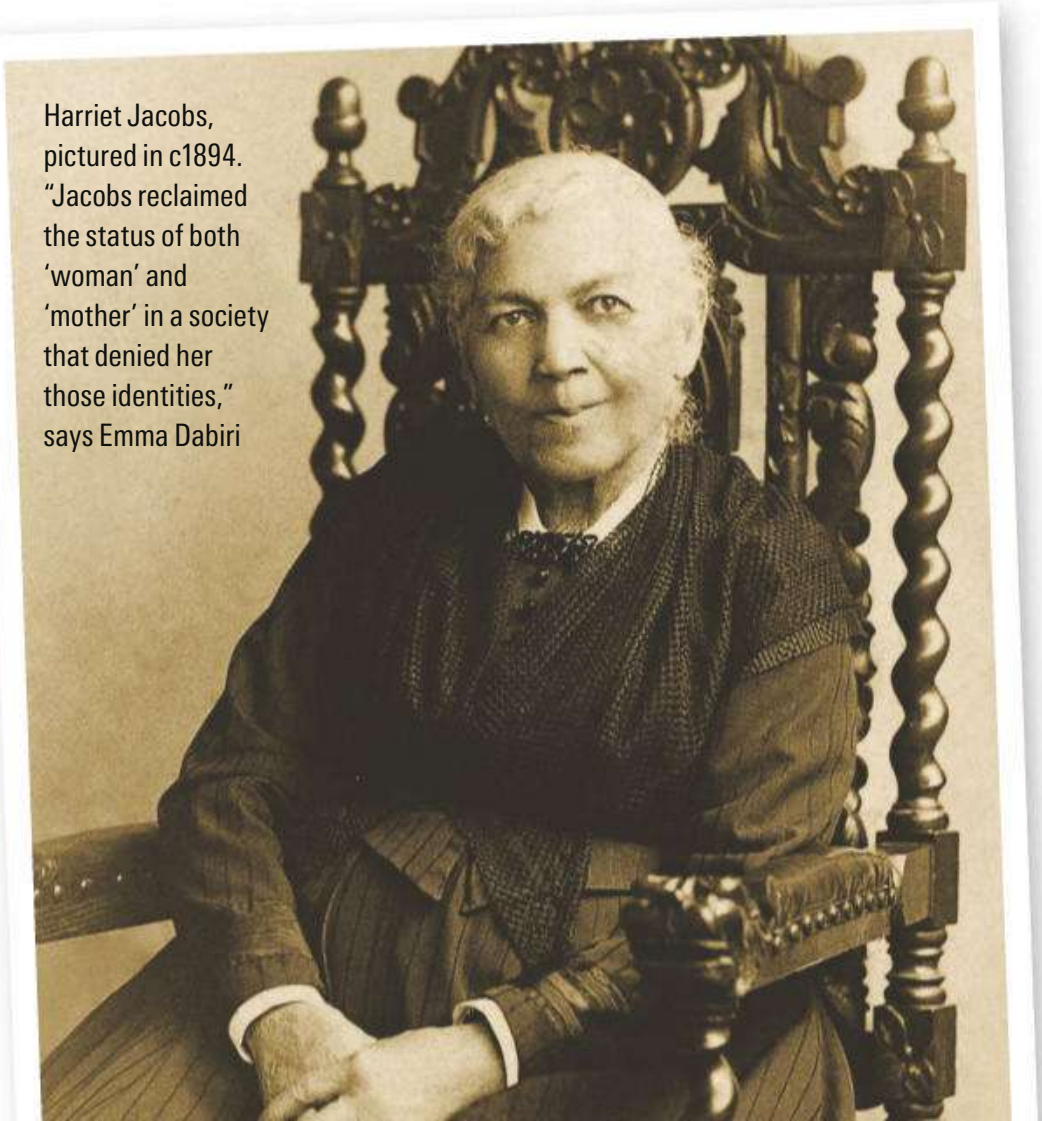
Sawyer did eventually agree to buy the children. However, not only did Norcom refuse to grant their freedom, he also wanted revenge, and threatened to send the children to another plantation that was renowned for brutalising enslaved people. Harriet, terrified, suspected that Norcom might relent if she were out of the picture, so plotted her escape – though, with slave catchers out in full force, she knew that she was unlikely to get far. She made her way to the home of her grandmother, a member of the local free black community, and together they devised a plan: Harriet would hide in the crawl space in her grandmother's attic until an opportunity to escape arose.

In the event, Harriet spent seven years in her crawlspace prison, which was less than 3 metres long, two and a half wide and just a metre high. She suffered terribly: her refuge was infested with rats and mice, and she was "restless for want of air". The atmosphere was "so stifled that even mosquitoes would not condescend to buzz in it". She suffered from psychotic episodes and almost went lame.

Yet her sacrifice paid off. Norcom agreed to sell the children to Sawyer and, weeks later, they were sent to live with their grandmother – oblivious to the fact that their fugitive mother was just metres away, watching them grow up through a tiny hole she had bored through the floor.

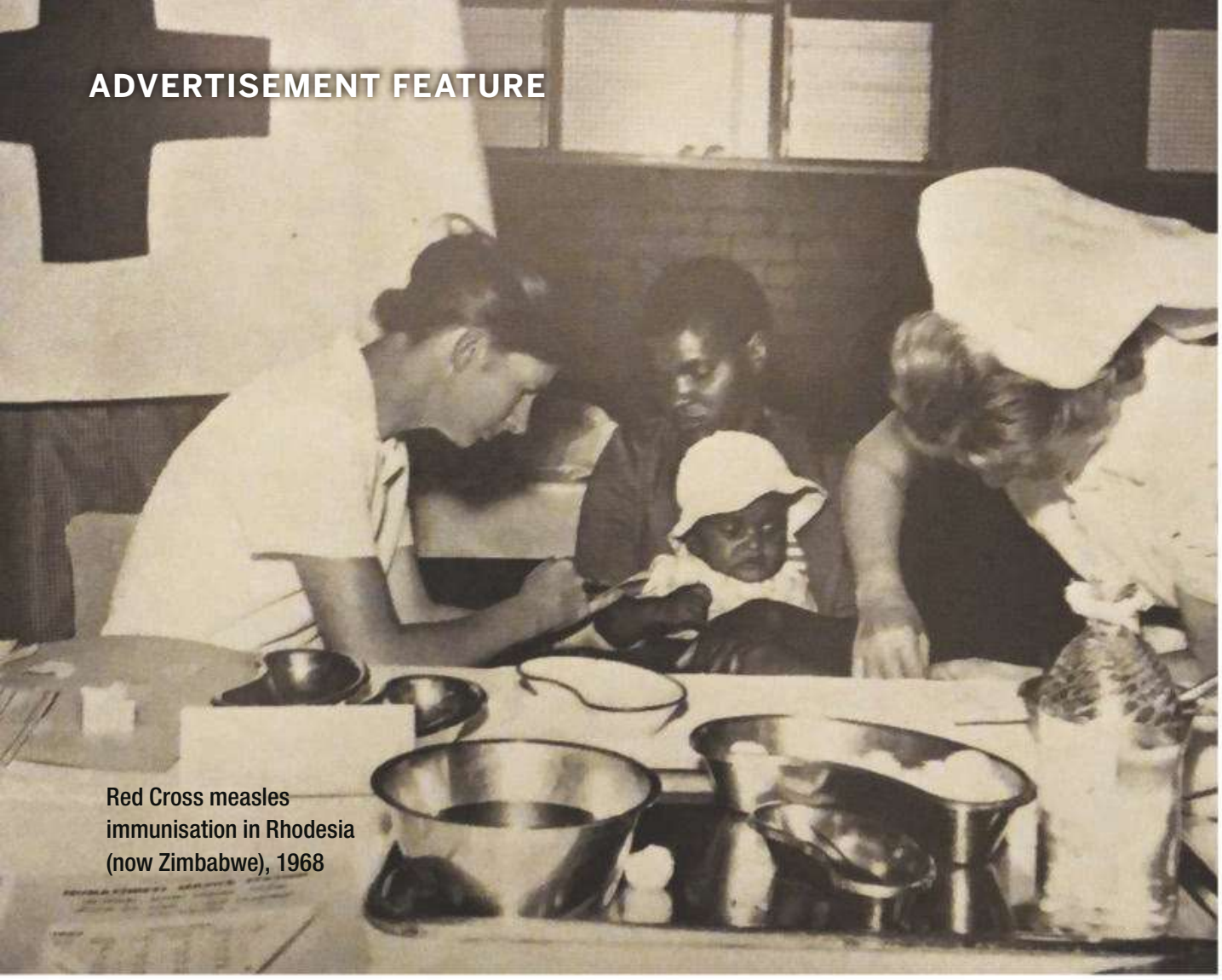
Harriet is an incredibly important figure. She was the first African-American woman to write a slave narrative at a time when it was a crime for black people to read or write. Moreover, *Incidents* is the only slave narrative that focuses on sexual exploitation during an era in which rape was used as a form of terror against enslaved women – and in which the courts upheld the principle that sexual assault of women of African descent was not a crime.

Yet her account is still not as widely known as it should be. Importantly, it highlights the long history of people sometimes described today as "mixed race", giving the lie to the idea that increased "race mixing" is somehow modern, or automatically leads to less-racist societies. Along with African-American novelist Harriet B Wilson, Jacobs' book reclaimed the status of both "woman" and "mother" in a society that denied those identities to these women. I urge everyone to read it. H



Harriet Jacobs, pictured in c1894. "Jacobs reclaimed the status of both 'woman' and 'mother' in a society that denied her those identities," says Emma Dabiri

ALAMY



Red Cross measles immunisation in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), 1968

A vaccination shield used to protect the patient's skin from damage or infection following the procedure, early 20th century

British Red Cross poster for the promotion of health and disease prevention, 1934

Vaccination. A history of saving lives

By Mehzebin Adam, curator, British Red Cross Museum and Archives

Smallpox, a highly infectious and deadly disease, used to be endemic around the world. In the 18th century alone, an estimated 60 million people died from smallpox in Europe. During the 20th century, it killed around 300 million people globally. An important development came when Edward Jenner, an English physician and scientist, discovered a vaccine for smallpox in 1796.

Vaccination soon became standard practice for preventing smallpox, and the World Health Organisation officially declared smallpox eradicated in 1980. The discovery of the smallpox vaccine also led to the development of many more life-saving vaccines, significantly reducing the rates of other diseases such as polio, measles, and tetanus.

Just as the British Red Cross is supporting the NHS with the Covid-19 (coronavirus) vaccination programme today, we have played an essential role in past vaccination campaigns to prevent diseases and improve public health. During the Second World War, British Red Cross volunteers helped give diphtheria vaccines to families evacuated from their homes. Following a smallpox outbreak in Glasgow in 1950, British Red Cross volunteers assisted NHS staff in mass vaccination centres. An estimated 250,000 people were vaccinated within the first 12 days.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the British Red Cross has supported the most vulnerable people in the UK and overseas. Some of the essential work includes delivering food and medicine, making sure refugees and people seeking asylum are safe, and providing an emotional support helpline.

Just as vaccines have helped save lives in the past, they are vital in the fight against Covid-19 today. The work of the British Red Cross this year includes supporting the NHS to vaccinate millions of people. As the vaccine roll-out continues across the country, there is hope on the horizon.

LEAVE A LEGACY

The work carried out by the British Red Cross is as vital today in vaccinating communities against Covid-19, as it was during the 1950s Smallpox outbreak in Glasgow. This support is made possible by the kindness of its volunteers and the generosity of people leaving gifts in wills, allowing the Red Cross to help those in crisis, when disaster strikes.

The British Red Cross is offering a free will writing service for supporters to get their will written or updated for free. There is no obligation to include a gift to charity, however if you choose to do so, your legacy will live on in the help you provide to those who need it most.

FIND OUT MORE

▶ To learn more about the history of vaccination, take a look at our online exhibition:
redcross.org.uk/vaccinationexhibition

▶ Learn the facts about vaccines on our new Covid-19 vaccine hub:
redcross.org.uk/covid-19-vaccine

ALL IMAGES © BRITISH RED CROSS MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

BritishRedCross

For more information about supporting the British Red Cross with a gift in your will and the Free Will scheme, visit redcross.org.uk/freewill or call 0300 500 0401

LETTERS

Former PM Theresa May in 2019. Reader Stephen Martin highlights her as an example of a leader who attended a grammar school

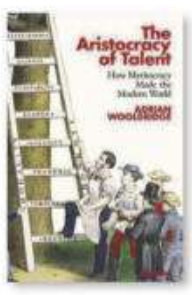
LETTER OF THE MONTH

Rebel women

I was looking forward to reading the Peasants' Revolt article that promised to "reveal the true identity of the rebels of 1381" (May), but was disappointed that yet again the women of the revolt were not part of the narrative.

Latin court records show that Joanna Ferrour was charged as the "chief perpetrator and leader of rebellious evildoers from Kent", ordering the beheading of the archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury, as well as the Lord High Treasurer, Robert Hales. She also played a major part in the famous looting and burning of the Savoy Palace, stealing a chest of gold and distributing it among the peasant rebels. Equally, Katherine Gamen was charged with aiding and abetting the beheading of Chief Justice John Cavendish, cutting the tie ropes of the boat in which he was trying to escape. There were at least 70 women in the Suffolk rebellion too, yet when we read about the Peasants' Revolt we implicitly think that everyone who participated was male.

I have become increasingly aware of this in my teaching by looking through school resources and realising that we give specific names to at least five times more men than women in any period of history. Of course, this is often the unfortunate nature of the historical record, but when we do have specific names of women, let's make sure we use them to show they weren't just always wives, mothers, or mistresses – but people using as much agency as they could within the boundaries imposed upon them.
Laura Aitken-Burt, London



We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **The Aristocracy of Talent** by Adrian Wooldridge. You can read our review of the book on page 82

Splitting the vote

It was fascinating to read Sir Anthony Seldon's survey of prime ministerial developments over the centuries (*The Hot Seat*, May). I was reminded of a quotation attributed to the former Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney: "If your only objective is to be popular, you're going to be popular. But you will be known as the prime minister who achieved nothing."

Perhaps there is a need to recognise that divisive British prime ministers might continue to split opinion precisely because they were able to bring about meaningful changes while in office. Regardless of position on the political spectrum, it could be argued that the ability to enact tangible change is testament to the presence of real leadership quality.

Seldon's article might prompt us to ponder whether the least controversial prime ministers are, in fact, the least effective. Furthermore, competing modern political allegiances need not obstruct appreciation of the human qualities shown by historic figures.
Daniel Adamson, Cambridge

The prime candidate

I enjoyed Anthony Seldon's interesting and informative article celebrating 300 years of the office of prime minister. I particularly liked the seven questions about the office of PM and his attempts at answers. I was a little disappointed, though, in his conclusions.

I agree with Sir Anthony that, for much of the time, Number 10 has been full of cronies and mates who look and sound like the prime minister. Sir Anthony then concludes that "more women, people from BAME backgrounds, and people with regional accents are urgently needed".

While I agree that prime ministers should not be clones of their predecessors, we need those in office who are most able to fulfil the role rather than being appointed purely because of their background, race or education. Given social and educational and conditions historically, it is not surprising that the majority of the holders of the office of prime minister have come from privileged backgrounds with a public school and Oxbridge education.

However, during the reign of the present Queen there have been 14 prime ministers, of which two have been women, one had a very modest education (Callaghan), five have had a grammar school education (Wilson, Thatcher, Major, Brown and May) and four have not been from the south-east of England (Wilson, Thatcher, Blair and Brown). While we obviously do not know who the next prime minister will be, given the composition of Boris Johnson's cabinet, if the next incumbent is from the Conservative party, he or she could well come from the BAME community.
Stephen Martin, Harrow

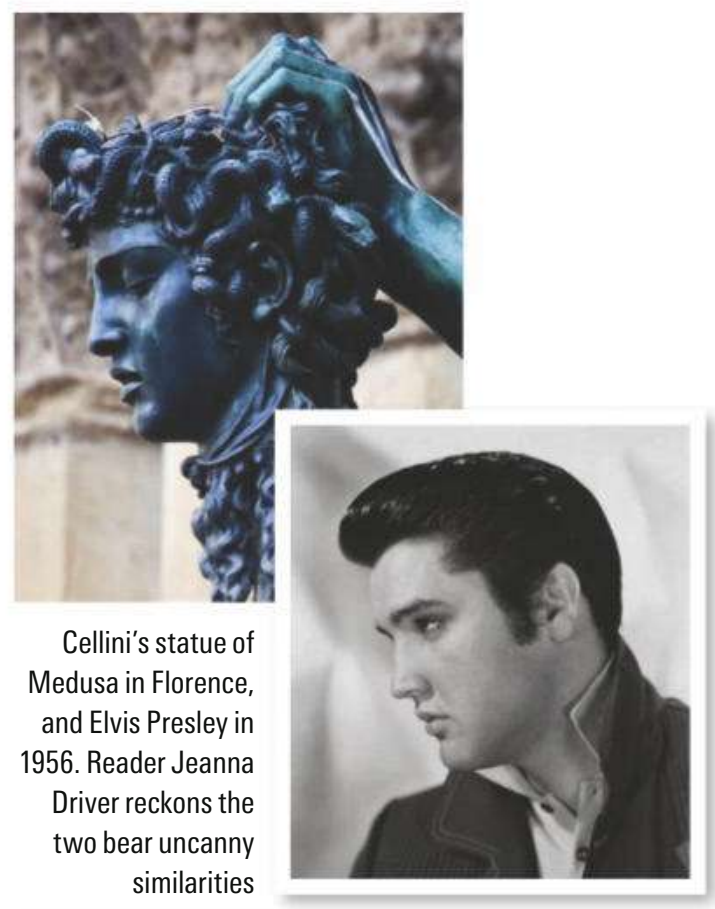
Myth or history?

Unfortunately there is no knock-down proof for the historicity of Jesus (*Letters*, June). The references in Tacitus prove the existence of Christians, not of Jesus himself. (The fact that thousands believed in Isis is no proof that Isis was an actual historical person.)

The references in Josephus, meanwhile, are later Christian interpolations, not by Josephus. St Paul never met the Jesus of history. Even so, through the screen of fiction and myth (which dominates the New Testament) people have felt able to discern the presence of an actual person. For many this is proof enough, but it is not exactly a historical proof.
Frank Walker, Cambridge

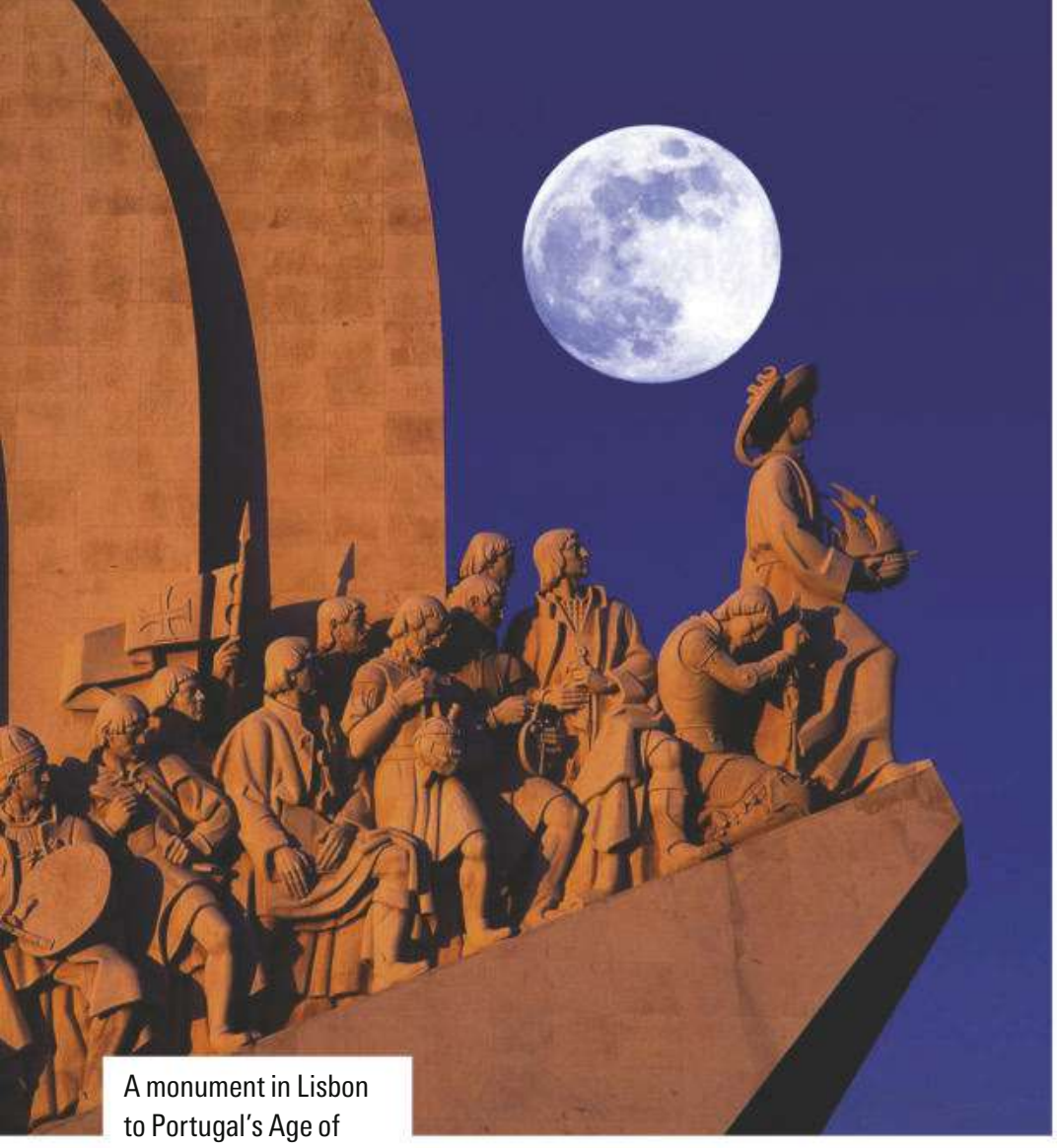
Rock profiles

After looking at the photo of the statue *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* in Jerry Brotton's article *The Supreme Scoundrel of the Renaissance* (April), I have one question: has anyone else noticed the resemblance of Medusa's profile to the King, Elvis Presley?
Jeanna Driver, Houston



Cellini's statue of Medusa in Florence, and Elvis Presley in 1956. Reader Jeanna Driver reckons the two bear uncanny similarities

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



A monument in Lisbon to Portugal's Age of Discovery. Reader Roger Webber highlights the role of John of Gaunt's descendants in the nation's flourishing era of exploration

ALAMY

Father and farther

In the concluding paragraph of Helen Carr's otherwise very comprehensive account of John of Gaunt (*The Man Who Would Be King*, May), an addition could be made: "Despite his failure in Castile, John of Gaunt became the father of long lines of famous monarchs in England and Spain – *and of the history of Portuguese exploration*."

The marriage of John's eldest daughter, Philippa, to King John I of Portugal gave rise to what is known there as the "illustrious generation". Not only did it include the next king but a younger son who we know as Prince Henry the Navigator. It is reputed that Philippa actively encouraged her son's exploratory interests, meaning that John of Gaunt's line can also claim some part in the age of exploration that was to follow.

Roger Webber, Argyll

Correction

▸ In June's *Talking Points* column, some additional text was accidentally added to historian Dean Irwin's tweet about the Bodleian Bowl. This error occurred during the editing process and was not the fault of the article's author, Anna Whitelock.

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▸ **Page 48**

MERC OF

When the Black Death tore through Europe, it wreaked havoc on England's trade networks with the continent. Yet not all merchants were pitched into penury. **Robert Blackmore** introduces the traders who made a mint in the wake of a human catastrophe

ILLUSTRATION BY **LAURIE AVON**

HANTS
DOOM

"The year 1348 was the great death for all the world, and this was so severe in Bordeaux that La Rousselle, the Pont Saint-Jean and the Rue Poitevine were burned." So reports the *Petite Chronique de Guyenne* on the cataclysmic pandemic now known as the "Black Death".

The plague was a human catastrophe, killing between one-third and a half of the population of Europe between 1346 and 1353. But, as was evident during my research into the mercantile history of this period, it was also an economic disaster, triggering one of the toughest periods in history to conduct trade. The example of Bordeaux, the commercial hub of Aquitaine in today's south-west France, captures the cost to both lives and livelihoods perfectly. Here, the people were so desperate that they set fire to their own city in an effort to stop the spread of the pandemic. It was a futile effort. They were not spared the disease – and the act destroyed large parts of their mercantile district.

Historians have written much about the consequences of the Black Death: not just the misery, but also the relative prosperity of some survivors. Long-distance commerce illustrates both of these trends. Many merchants and their agents suffered ruin or death just like the rest. However, for those who endured, it could be a time of great possibility. While scant sources survive detailing people's personal experiences, it has been possible to piece together evidence from medieval trade and begin to reconstruct their world.

England in the mid-14th century was tightly bound, both politically and economically, to continental Europe. The Duchy of Aquitaine, comprising the territories of Guyenne and Gascony, had been in a union with the English crown since the accession of King Henry II in 1154 – the result of his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine. This had promoted a flourishing trade route along the Atlantic seaboard. Commodities such as wool, cloth, tin, grain and fish were carried south. Returning north was some dye, honey and iron but overwhelmingly wine, to be consumed in vast quantities in courts, castles, households and taverns. Taxes on these goods made an increasingly important contribution to royal finances, and their documentation can tell us a great deal.

Commerce between England and Aquitaine had declined significantly during the opening years of the conflict with France now known as the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). The onset of the Black Death soon brought another severe recession.

There was plenty of time for the passengers to suffer fever, vomiting and festering buboes

Royal tragedy

A statuette of plague victim Princess Joan in Westminster Abbey. News of Joan's death near Bordeaux would have soon reached merchants in England

DEAN AND CHAPTER OF WESTMINSTER/ALAMY

Surviving customs records from Bordeaux show how, during the 12 months from September 1348, just 74 vessels left carrying wine, where in previous decades there would have been many hundreds each year. Merchants and shipowners were possibly put off by news of the terrible state of the city and the knowledge that, over the summer, Princess Joan, beloved daughter of King Edward III, had perished of plague nearby. But, more likely, their absence was because, by then, the disease was already spreading through their own home ports (see box, page 25).

Of those who did brave the voyage, the highest number of English ships, 10 in total, were based out of Dartmouth in Devon. This was such a crucial town for maritime transport to Aquitaine that the poet Geoffrey Chaucer later made it the home of the shipman in his Canterbury Tales – described in the General Prologue as having "drawn very many a draft of wine, while coming from Bordeaux, while the merchant slept".

Larger ports like Bristol (which experienced plague from the summer of 1348) and London (which was affected from the autumn) still contributed a few ships. There were also eight vessels from Hull and six from Great Yarmouth – their relative abundance perhaps explained by the fact that plague did not reach that far north until 1349. A further 11 ships from the southern Gascon city of Bayonne made the journey north, but just one from fire-ravaged Bordeaux itself.

Food for vermin

Merchants, agents, shipmasters and sailors were all accustomed to the threats to their lives and livelihoods of shipwreck and piracy. Plague at sea must have been something even more terrifying. Given the prevalence of the disease both in Bordeaux and in southern England, most ships operating that year would have carried some *Yersinia pestis* (plague bacilli), either in the blood streams of people on board, or in the fleas living on rats in the hold. Grain cargoes would have, of course, provided ample food for vermin.

How long the journey took between the south coast and the duchy depended on the weather. It could take just four to five days, though one royal official spent three weeks at sea in 1357. So, given that the incubation period of plague is two to six days, there was plenty of time for symptoms to appear – the fever, the vomiting, the festering buboes – and for infection to spread among the passengers and crew.

Even for those individuals whose goods and persons arrived safely it was an astonishingly volatile economy in which to trade. First of all, prices collapsed. As Henry Knighton, a canon of St Mary's Abbey in Leicester, later

Terrible affliction
A doctor lances a bubo in a 14th-century fresco. The Black Death devastated markets and made stepping aboard a merchant ship a terrifying prospect

Money spinner
A 14th-century map of Europe and, inset, a coin depicting Edward III. The trade between England and its possessions on the continent was worth enormous sums of money to the exchequer

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

reported: "There were small prices for everything." He believed this, "on account of the fear of death. For there were very few who cared about riches or anything else." More probably, the crash was simply the result of so many consumers having died.

Then, since a scarcity of labour drove up wages, "many crops perished in the fields for want of someone to gather them", and prices would subsequently rise. In some areas there were severe shortages. In Rochester Cathedral Priory, William Dene recounted that "supplies ran short and the brethren had great difficulty in getting enough to eat". The experience would have been similar wherever plague hit.

Reports of mortality and financial crisis in coastal trading centres were widespread. For instance, it was conveyed to the king in 1350 that in Newcastle upon Tyne "several merchants and other rich men… have perished in the mortal pestilence lately raging, and the men now in the town, who used to live of their merchandise, are so impoverished by the said pestilence and other adversities in these times of war that they hardly have wherewith to live". In Hull it was recounted that by 1353 "a great part of the people of the said town have died in the last deadly pestilence which raged in these parts, and that the remnant left in the town are so desolate and poverty-stricken in money".

Rallying point

But even amid such complaints are indications of some prosperity returning. Disrupted and unstable markets offered the chance of great profits for those in a position to exploit them. Here the merchants who operated into and out of Bordeaux were ideally placed. In 1349–50, the second year of the plague in England, prices of Gascon wine in the kingdom more than doubled, but then so did the quantity that was shipped. After this, though trade levels were erratic, there was an upward trend through the 1350s and into the 1360s as the slow recovery from the pandemic got under way. This coincided with a rapid growth of English cloth exports, partly because Edward III had intervened in the trade with Flanders, imposing high export duties on wool and periodic embargoes.

There are signs that this renewal – and the revenues it generated – was falling into the hands of an increasingly narrow group. You had to survive the disease itself, of course. But you also had to stay solvent – by having good credit or by building partnerships with other merchants – so as to cover unforeseen costs caused by higher wages and fluctuating prices. The skilled use of such financial tools was key, just as it was for Chaucer's merchant, who "employed well his wit" such that "no

Grape for the bottom line
A man treads on grapes in a c1230 window in Notre-Dame de Paris. In the second year of plague, the price of Gascon wine more than doubled

Those who survived and stayed solvent were ideally placed to make sizeable profits

Slash and earn
Men threshing wheat, c1330. The huge death toll in the late 1340s meant fewer labourers to work the land – and higher wages for those that did

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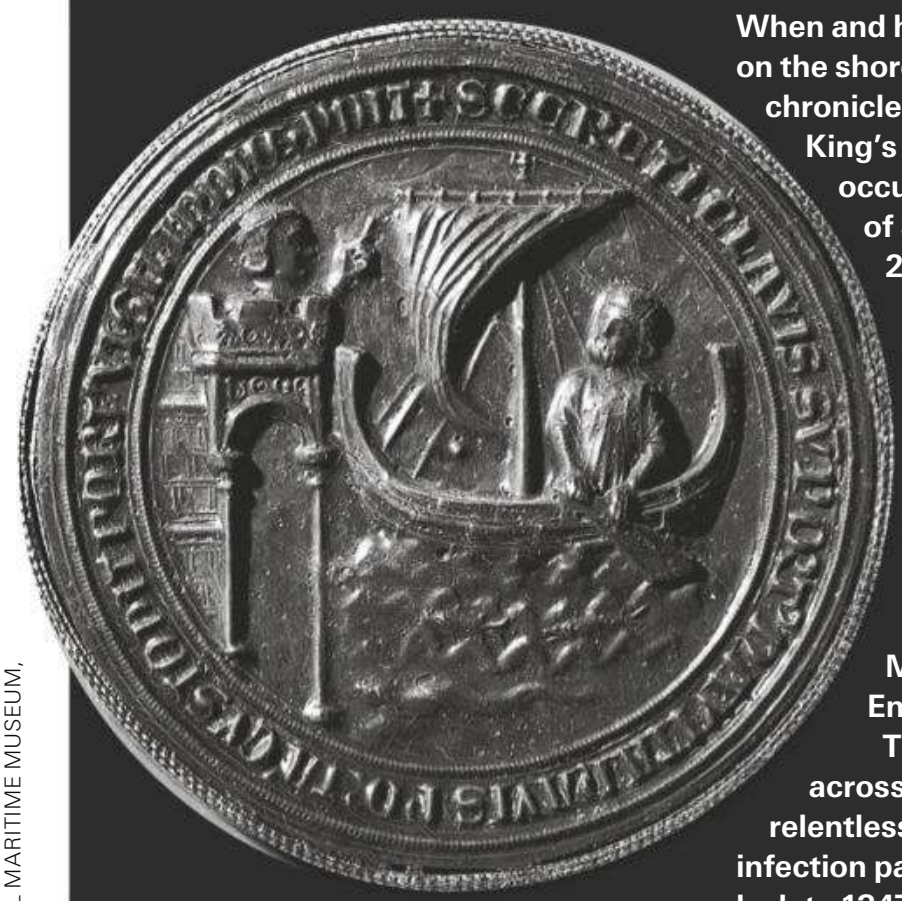
Sailing into trouble?
Goods are loaded on to a ship in a c1300 manuscript. As well as cargo, merchant vessels often carried plague bacilli both in the crews' blood streams and on the fleas living on rats in the hold

A DEADLY CARGO

The Black Death may have first reached England's shores aboard a merchant ship



Watery graves
A late 13th/early 14th-century seal of Bristol, whose status as a key port made it one of the first English towns to feel the force of the Black Death

BRIDGEMAN/ NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON

When and how did the plague first arrive on the shores of England? According to a chronicler in the Franciscan friary of King's Lynn, the fateful moment occurred shortly before the feast of St John the Baptist on 24 June 1348 when a ship from Aquitaine made landfall in Melcombe (in modern-day Weymouth). "One of the sailors had brought with him from Gascony the seeds of the terrible pestilence," the chronicler reported, "and through him the men of that town of Melcombe were the first in England to be infected."

The Black Death's passage across Europe had been swift and relentless. Arriving from the east, the infection passed from Sicily to Marseille by late 1347. Then, aided by a truce in the Hundred Years' War that September, it moved quickly west across the south of France, reaching Bordeaux by mid-1348, in time for the last spring departures of wines to England.

In Oxford, Geoffrey le Baker asserted that, following its arrival in Melcombe, plague spread through "the seaports in Dorset, and then those living inland, and from there it raged so dreadfully through Dorset and Somerset as far as Bristol". This occurred before plague even reached the channel coast of France overland. More crucially, it would not arrive in Flanders – the other key trading route by which the plague could be brought into English ports – until 1349.

In reality, it's improbable that the rapid spread originated from one carrier and by a single route. More likely it arrived multiple times, moving with the busy coastal trade before entering through many ports. Henry Knighton, writing later in St Mary's Abbey, Leicester, stated that "the grievous plague penetrated the sea coasts from Southampton, and came to Bristol". By the time it reached London – around the feast of All Saints (1 November) 1348, according to Robert of Avesbury – the disease had already spread across much of southern England.

Chin, chin
Men drink wine in a scene from a 14th-century health handbook. One merchant saw his wine exports surge by a factor of 25 in the decade following the arrival of plague

AKG-IMAGES/ALAMY

Immense suffering
A cross erected in a village in eastern France in 1349 to protect the local population from the Black Death. From 1346–53, plague killed between a third and a half of all Europeans

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one who knew that he was in debt". Trade records offer plentiful success stories. Robert Selby (later mayor of Hull in 1365 and 1371) left Bordeaux on 19 November 1348 with just a few barrels of wine, yet in 1355–56, Selby was still trading: exporting at least five and a half times the quantity as before. Some Gascon traders were likewise buoyant. In 1357–58 the wine exports of Pey Gassie, a cloth merchant of Bordeaux, were almost 25 times those in 1348–49.

In an environment when merchants could make huge sums of money in a short space of time, the government of Edward III reacted quickly to suppress perceived opportunism. While the famous Ordinance of Labourers of June 1349 mainly aimed to control rising wages, it also ordered a halt to escalating prices for victuals by ensuring "sellers have moderate gains, and not excessive". In the medieval mind, speculation and market manipulation were essentially the same. Scholastic writers were often hostile towards profits from trade, drawing on ancient philosophers – particularly Aristotle – or biblical texts, such as *Ecclesiasticus*: "As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling." This sentiment entered canon law in the mid-12th century. The jurist Gratian established in the *Decretum* that profits made from price margins were a "shameful gain". The influential 13th-century philosopher Thomas Aquinas saw profit as justifiable for a merchant only "to compensate for his work and not his own sake".

Of vice and men

The secular authorities in England evidently determined that the Black Death had unleashed an orgy of profiteering, and they fought back with mounting regulation. Further writs in December 1349 proclaimed against merchants "forestalling the market". Forestalling primarily meant making wholesale purchases before the expected time or place. In reality, it could also cover pre-agreeing prices or stockpiling – described at the parliament of 1362 as the "connivance of various men". Chancery rolls, which recorded outgoing government business, provide evidence for the strength of the reaction to this practice. There were 17 entries in the Patent Rolls relating to forestalling during 1325–49; by 1350–74 this had grown fivefold to 85.

Given such a high level of interference, it was best to be either close to government or avoid it altogether. Between one-fifth and one-third of trade was probably smuggled, while the people otherwise best positioned to gain from legitimate commerce were those with strong political connections. Chief among the latter were Bordeaux's burgesses. Their loyalty was vital for any English king, and they held a distinct legal and economic status that gave them valuable commercial privileges, not least the tax-free export of the wine produced on their vineyards: a key competitive advantage over other growers in tough periods. Even before the Black Death, the most successful families had begun to join the ranks of the lesser local nobility. After the pandemic, this process intensified.

The church in Bordeaux also enjoyed this same preferential categorisation for its goods and, as a result, it increased its exports substantially during the century after 1348. At the same time, English merchants and shipowners increasingly dominated the overseas trade through the city. This was probably why the king's great council of September 1353 agreed strict new rules regulating their activities – covering when, where and how they could trade.

The career of William Wakefield (died 1360) provides one illuminating example of this English ascendancy. It demonstrates how individuals could exploit their relationship with government – especially after war with France resumed, in fits and bursts, from 1349. Around the point of the Black Death's arrival, Wakefield moved his business to Bordeaux and secured himself the privileges of a burgess. He then imported wheat, rye and other goods from England to supply the city's Château de l'Ombrière, the castle that housed the duchy's government, as well as provision garrisons in other fortresses and towns, such as that in Blaye.

Wakefield also expanded his exports of Gascon wine into northern markets to prodigious proportions, capitalising on rising prices. By 1359, after he was captured and ransomed by partisans of the king of France, Wakefield claimed to have lost wine and other goods worth £5,000. Given that one of the wealthiest contemporary noblemen of England, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, had a gross annual income of £8,380, this was an immense sum. With the support of the king's son Edward, the Black Prince, Wakefield accumulated property around Bordeaux – including vineyards and meadows – and even the use of a tower in the city walls. After his death, these remained in his family until 1398 when his final beneficiary, Helen, also died.

The records of trade are awash with such characters making gains even in challenging circumstances. They are proof that, every time Europe was buffeted by war and plague in the 14th century, a degree of recovery was attempted, and some people made fortunes.

Historians of this turbulent period have broadly taken the view that medieval people simply reacted to environmental or societal forces rather than exercising much agency. Yet, even in the midst of one of the great crises in human history, some saw tremendous opportunities for profit and advancement – and they weren't about to let these opportunities slip through their fingers. H

Moving on up
A medieval merchant's house in Southampton. Many traders who survived the Black Death faced a "time of great possibility", writes Robert Blackmore

Edward III introduced laws to control rising wages and counter potential profiteers

Robert Blackmore is an economic historian of the Middle Ages. His book *Government and Merchant Finance in Anglo-Gascon Trade, 1300-1500* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2020

LISTEN In a recent episode of BBC Radio 4's *Long View*, Jonathan Freedland explored **The Unexpected Impact of the Black Death**. Listen here: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000k7j8*

» For more on the impact of catastrophes on human history, turn the page to read our interview with Niall Ferguson

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A detail from Jan van Eyck's 15th-century *The Crucifixion and the Last Judgment* diptych. A fascination with our own doom is embedded within the human psyche, says Niall Ferguson

"Political decisions determine how high the body count of a disaster goes"

In his new book, **Niall Ferguson** explores the history of disasters from Vesuvius to Covid-19 – and the lessons we can learn from these events. He spoke to **Matt Elton**

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Your new book on catastrophe is obviously hugely timely, given the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. When did you start the process of researching and writing it?
I had been wanting to write a history of dystopia, and of how the end of the world has been imagined in science fiction, for some time now – certainly before the advent of Covid-19. And then, in January 2020, I realised that what was unfolding was one of those pandemics I had been reading about in science fiction books about the end of the world. So I managed to persuade my editors that I should write a comprehensive history of disaster.

Have we always been fascinated by our own doom?
It's clearly deeply embedded in the human psyche because in almost all world religions there is some kind of apocalyptic dénouement. In both Islam and Christianity, for instance, there is an "end time". Even in religions that imagine some kind of cyclical process, there's a catastrophe before there is rebirth. This shows us that we are fascinated by the idea of the end, whether of the species, the planet, or the universe. That fascination means we slightly exaggerate the probability of the end of the world and jump to the conclusion that it's happening when even a medium-sized disaster happens.

How good do you think humanity is at conceptualising the effects and outcomes of a disaster?
There's a great song, popular with Tommies on the western front in the First World War, which goes: "The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling / For you but not for me / Oh! Death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling / Oh! Grave, thy victory?" It's a good example of how the British like to laugh at death – and, indeed, gallows humour is a big part of many different cultures. But it also captures an important truth: if you're facing the risk of death or terrible injury, you are still likely to think that it's going to happen to someone else. We aren't very good at applying probabilities of death to ourselves.

What kinds of disaster do you explore in your book?
I have tried to capture disaster in all its forms. The bulk of the book is about large-scale disasters that cause a lot of people to die sooner than would otherwise have been the case. That includes disasters that we think of as natural – volcanic eruptions such as Vesuvius in AD 79, earthquakes, wildfires, floods or droughts – as well as what we think of as manmade disasters. The big disasters that have historically affected significant percentages of humanity are wars and pandemics.

Interestingly, though, we sometimes view events as disasters even when relatively few people are killed. When the US space shuttle *Challenger* disintegrated in 1986, for instance, the only people killed were the seven crew – and yet it looms large in the American memory. The sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912 is among the most famous disasters, but other shipping disasters have killed more people. So we don't always remember catastrophes in proportion to their death toll.

Do you think it's mistaken to conceptualise disasters as being "natural" or "manmade"?
It's a false dichotomy. The economist Amartya Sen made an important point about famines, which is that they are in some senses manmade – it's human agency that determines how far a crop failure leads to mass starvation.

That point applies more generally, too. A volcano eruption on a deserted island is a different prospect, for instance, than one next to a crowded metropolis. Human decisions such as where to build cities explain a lot of the big disasters in history. There are a lot of cities, especially in Asia, in locations that have a significant risk of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis. That's why the subtitle of my book is *The Politics of Catastrophe*: whether we think of them as natural or manmade, all disasters are ultimately politically mediated. Political decisions determine how high the body count is, even if the point of origin is something natural such as a novel pathogen or geological convulsion.

You explore how ideas of networks and network theory can help us make sense of historical disasters. What do we mean when we talk about networks in this sense?
My [2017] book *The Square and the Tower* aims to explain how network science is relevant to studying the past. The key idea is that "contagion" of various forms – whether due to a coronavirus or an item of fake news going viral – is a function of two things. Firstly, it's that pathogen or meme itself and, secondly, it's the social network structure that it attacks.

Social networks, of which we are all a part, are strange things. Plotted on a graph, they don't resemble lattices, in

Death from above One of the victims of the AD 79 eruption of Vesuvius. Although the disaster's death count is unknown, the nearby cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum had a combined population of 20,000

BRIDGEMAN

"When you finish reading this book, you will realise that there are many more than four Horsemen of the Apocalypse"

Apocalypse dreams
Flagellant monks – such as these shown in a c1365 manuscript – hoped their actions would ward off further divine wrath in times of crisis

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which each node has the same number of links. If you look at online social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, they instead feature a relatively small number of nodes which have a huge number of links, and many more which have very few links. In other words, some people have tons of followers, and lots of people have hardly any.

When you think about the world not as a series of hierarchies, with leaders at the top and lowly mortals down below, but instead as a social network with all these peculiar structural features, understanding this "contagion" becomes much easier. Take the case of Covid-19: it is a virus spread by a minority of infected people, or superspreaders. Roughly 20 per cent of infected people have done 80 per cent of the spreading – and if the virus gets to a superspreader, it takes off much faster than it would have in other places.

This explains why this pandemic has varied so much from place to place. Network science needs to be in the historian's toolkit – you can't really understand a plague or a revolution until you see that you're dealing with contagion in each case.

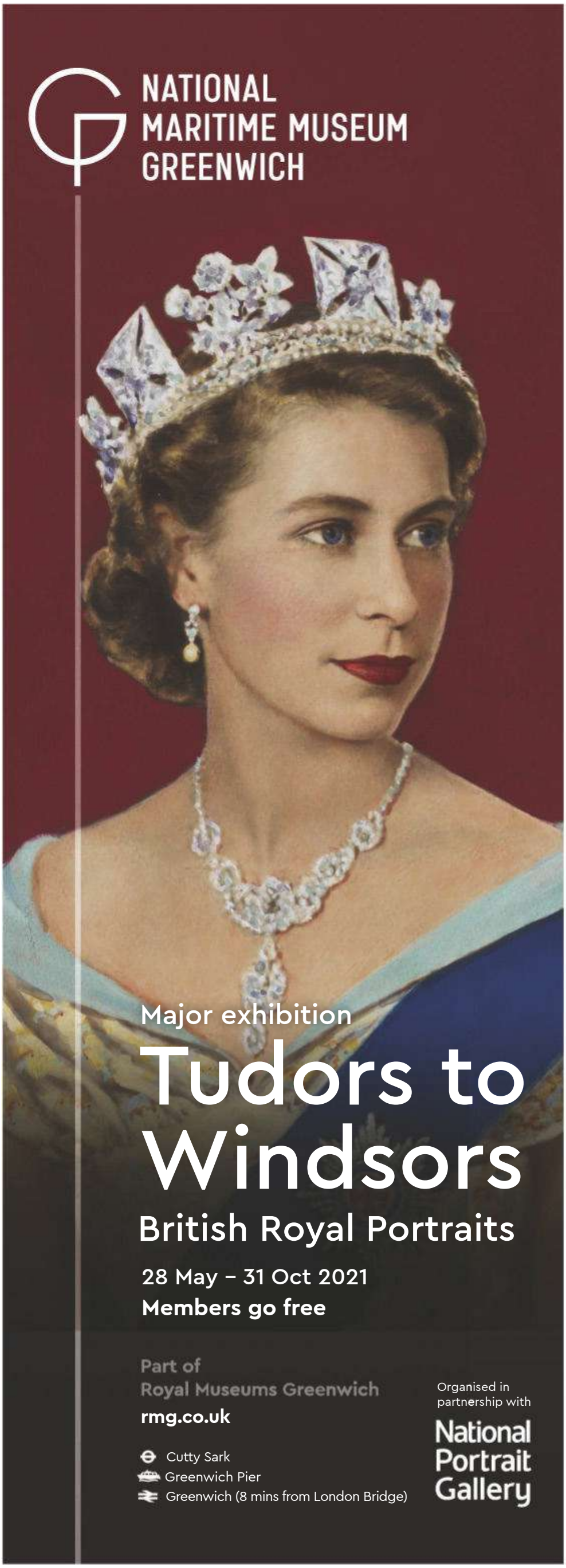
How can this help us make sense of the past, then?
Networks behave in ways that are not wholly intuitive. For example, there is the strange phenomenon of "homophily", in which people cluster together according to similar ideas or similar characteristics. That can also lead to the tendency for networks to polarise into clearly defined clusters – as in, for instance, the political system in the United States.

All of these properties of networks are hugely relevant to understanding disasters, because we can think of some as having a property of "contagion" – and not just pandemics, either. Most disasters are localised: a volcano, for instance, has to be of colossal size to have an impact on the network of the world's climatic system. There have been some, of course, but there hasn't been a global disaster caused by volcanic activity for a very long time. Similarly, many conflicts are localised: they can be hideously disruptive and have a very high mortality rate, but are restricted to being between two countries or within a single geography. But a few conflicts have this quality of contagion, because the sparring ideologies that they are sparked by spread rather like a virus of the mind. We can see that in Bolshevism in the Russian Civil War, for instance, and, later, fascism elsewhere in Europe.

One of the disasters you explore in the book is the worst pandemic in human history – the Black Death. We don't often think of the 14th-century world as "networked", so does this network theory still apply here?
Yes. That contagion initially spread rather slowly through central Asia, because the social networks there were relatively sparse [for more on the Black Death, see our feature on page 20]. But once it got to more densely populated places such as England and northern Italy, the fact that they had relatively well-maintained roads, navigable rivers and lots of trade meant there was a network ready to spread the bacillus.

At first this seems counterintuitive, because a political map of Europe in the 1340s shows the continent at its most fragmented. This wasn't the Roman empire, whose experience of massive plagues makes a kind of intuitive sense. It was a giant, integrated polity through which it seems obvious that various forms of pathogen would have spread. But it turns out that, although Europe was very politically fragmented at the time of the Black Death, its thriving trade and pilgrimage networks allowed the disease to spread.

You also write about extreme social behaviour caused by the Black Death. Do disasters provoke extreme behaviours among people who experience them?
If a society experiences great strain – through a sudden surge of excess mortality and the fear that goes with that, as well as the abnormal measures that have to be put in place to try to cope with it – that can create a very tense, febrile atmosphere. And, indeed, a couple of striking phenomena occurred in Europe after the onset of the Black Death. Firstly, extraordinary flagellant orders roamed the continent,



comprised of men who publicly flogged themselves and engaged in acts of penance to try to ward off further "divine retribution". Secondly, there were outbreaks of anti-Semitic violence and pogroms against Jewish communities, which were blamed for the plague.

I was reminded of these phenomena when I was watching the extraordinary events in the United States last summer, following the murder of George Floyd by [the then police officer] Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis. To most people, this looked like political protest, but to my eyes it resembled the kind of eruption you would anticipate in a time of plague. A great many of the protests were acts of expiation with often religious qualities: there were scenes of white people washing the feet of black pastors, for instance.

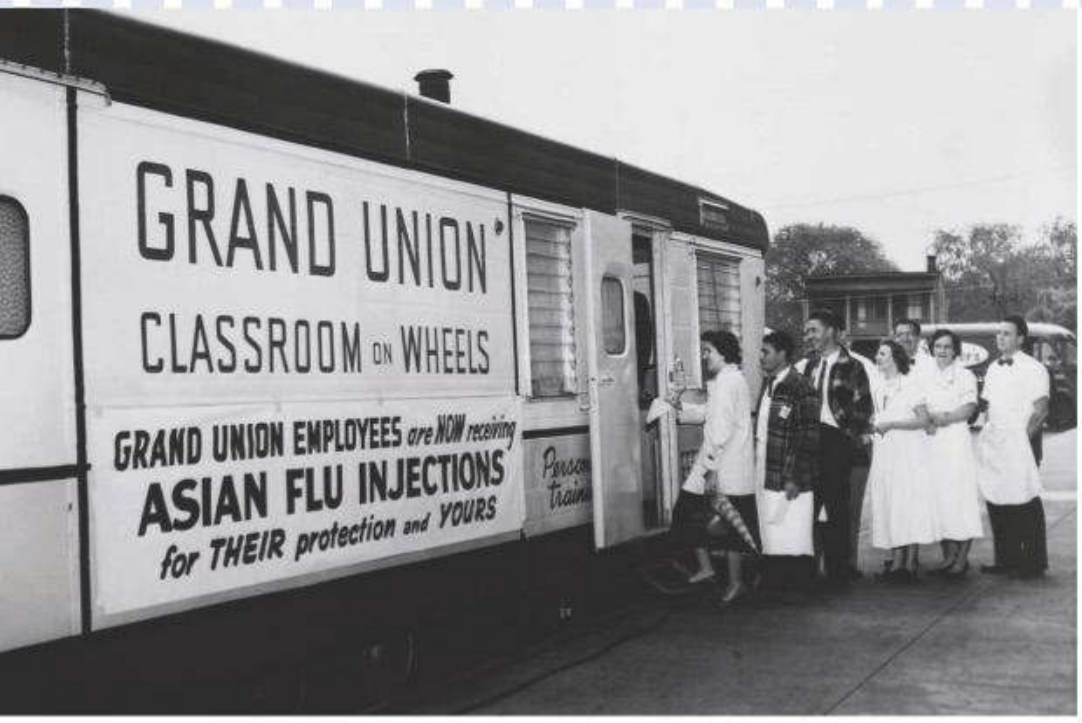
Do you think the protests took on a different form than they would have done had they not occurred in a pandemic?
Absolutely. I think it's very hard to believe that the protests would have been on anything like the same scale had it not been for the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic – the fear of sickness, the lockdowns, the pent-up frustrations of urban populations trapped at home for weeks on end.

One has to recognise that mass protests about racism and police brutality are not entirely logical in the midst of a pandemic. The scientific understanding we had at that point suggested that it wasn't an entirely prudent thing to do when a respiratory disease is spreading rapidly. (Although it has since become clear that Covid-19 spreads indoors much more than outdoors, and, in any case, the protests seem to have reduced the population's overall mobility, because people who worried about potential violence stayed at home.)

As a historian, I find this kind of thing fascinating because there are strong echoes of the febrile mood that accompanied previous pandemics. There were anti-mask protests in San Francisco during the 1918–19 influenza outbreak, for instance – and although that pandemic was much worse, with a much higher death toll, you can see some of the same anxieties percolating into politics recently. There's another interesting historical analogy here, too: in the 1920 US election, the winning candidate, Warren Harding, campaigned on a platform of a return to normalcy. It worked for him and it worked for Joe Biden this year, too.

Governance is another key theme of your book. Do you think that the management of disasters has got worse?
It has been obvious for some time that there is a general problem with the way in which governments perform in the democratic world. In my 2013 book *The Great Degeneration*,

"If society experiences great strain through a sudden surge of excess mortality, it can create a very febrile atmosphere"



Vaccine drive Residents of White Plains, New York State wait to be vaccinated against the 1957 flu pandemic. "An outbreak that killed about the same share of the population as has died so far by Covid-19 has been largely forgotten," says Ferguson

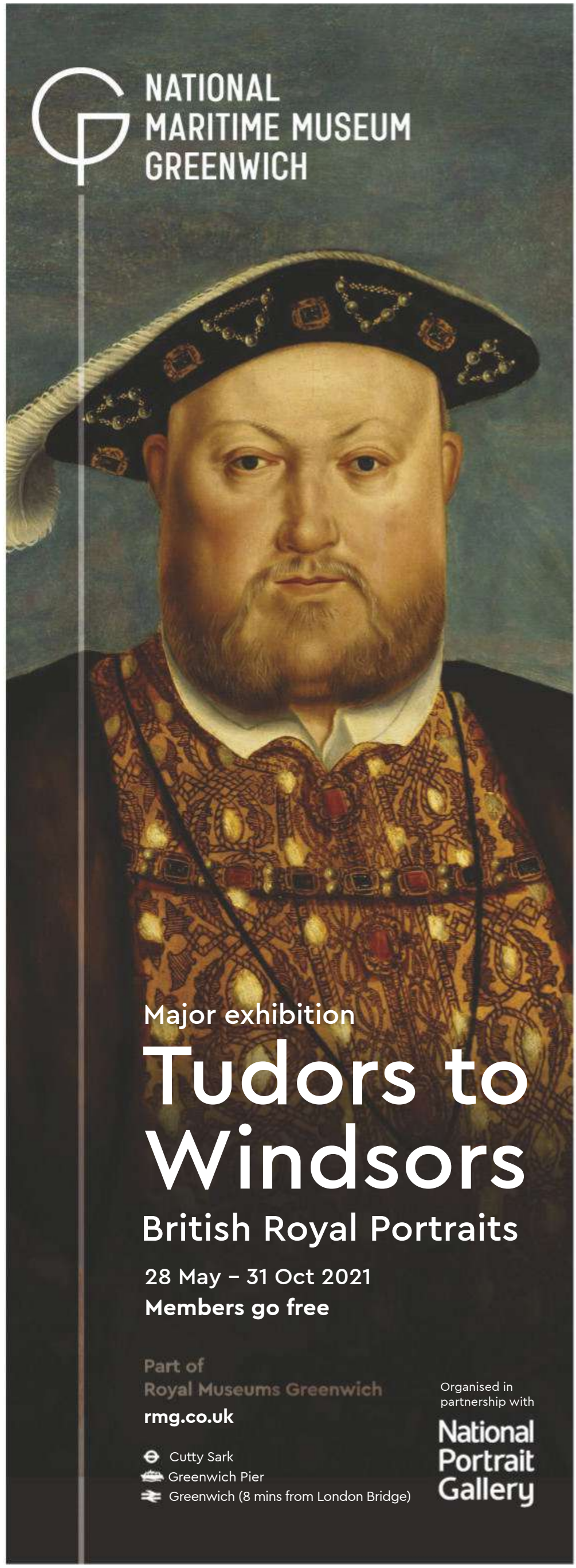
ALAMY

I argued that there has been a sort of degeneration of government. It has become excessively bureaucratic, very costly, and extremely good at generating regulation – much of which is, in fact, counter-productive.

Why government has become so dysfunctional over the past 20 years or so is the subject of much debate. One has the sense that it has been growing in size and shrinking in efficacy since the 1970s. And then, when the pandemic came along, the US was – on paper, at least – the best-prepared nation in the world, with the UK also up there near the top. There are an enormous number of people whose job it is to prepare for such a disaster, and a huge number of pandemic preparedness documents drawn up by countless agencies. Yet, when the pandemic actually did hit, none of it worked. In fact, things went horribly awry. Whereas nations such as Taiwan and South Korea were ready to ramp up testing and introduce electronic contact tracing, none of that happened in the UK or US. Instead, in the early months we were saying: "Oh well, it'll be just like influenza – we don't need to do anything except reach herd immunity." And then there was panic in March 2020 when it was suddenly realised that, if we did that, a really large number of people might die.

Are there historical examples of particularly good management of catastrophes?

The 1957–58 influenza pandemic is not a perfect like-for-like comparison with the coronavirus pandemic – it's a different kind of respiratory disease, and the outbreak in the US wasn't as bad – but it's still instructive to compare how the administration of President Eisenhower responded. They knew no more about how bad it would be at the start than we knew in January 2020 about how bad Covid-19 would be. Health experts told Eisenhower that there was no point in declaring an emergency or trying to stop the spread of the disease, and that they were just going to have to accept excess mortality until a vaccine could be developed. And that's what they did. They didn't lock anything down, they spent a tiny fraction of the money that the US government has spent in the past year, and the economy basically kept going. Although there was a mild recession, it had nothing to do with the pandemic – you can't see the pandemic in the economic data at all.



So what does this tell us? Yes, the US government in 2020 should have been much more like Taiwan and South Korea. But the expectation and acceptance of risk was also quite different. The US population in the 1950s had been through the Depression, the Second World War, and the Korean War. There was greater social cohesion – so much so that an outbreak that killed about the same share of the world's population as has died so far by Covid-19 has been largely forgotten.

Do we need to consider how the wider system responds to a disaster as much as the response of those in charge?
Absolutely. There's a mistaken idea, popular with journalists, that you can blame all the excess mortality in the US and UK in the past year on Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. I call it the "Tolstoy fallacy". In Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, the author has great fun at the expense of Napoleon's idea that everything was about, and caused by, him. Tolstoy points out that the extraordinary upheaval of 1812, in which thousands of French troops invaded Russia and committed all kinds of violent acts, was not simply because one man ordered it.

That's an important insight, and ties back in to the point about networks. The truth about government is that it's not one individual sitting at the top of the pyramid, handing out edicts. A lot of decisions have to be taken at a more local level – and in any case, with a problem such as a pandemic, presidents don't sit about reading journals trying to assess the infection fatality rate. They have experts and a bureaucracy to deal with those kinds of emergency. This is not to defend the conduct of either Trump or Johnson, both of whom made a great many mistakes, but instead to say that the failure was further down the chain of command.

What are the key factors in whether a society responds well to disaster?
It's better to be generally paranoid than specifically prepared, because you typically don't get the disaster you're preparing for. This is what gives history its ironic quality. For instance, we are currently talking about preparing for climate change to the exclusion of other disaster scenarios – and we have just been given one slap in the face by Covid-19, which by the standards of past pandemics is only a medium-sized disaster.

There is a whole range of disasters that can emerge much more quickly than climate change. War between the US and China has become a good deal more likely in the past few years, for instance, and would be an immediate and deadly disaster if it escalated to a nuclear level. There are four horsemen of the apocalypse, and I suspect when you finish reading *Doom*, you'll realise that there are more than four horsemen after us and they come in a whole bunch of forms.

System failure Onlookers react to the disintegration of the *Challenger* space shuttle, 1986. Niall Ferguson argues that the disaster is among many caused by problems inherent in bureaucracies

I think we need to change the culture in our bureaucracy, and get away from the tendency to manage risk with hugely detailed plans that ultimately render us myopic. It's important to be resilient, too. It is no accident that three countries that generally handled this crisis well – Taiwan, South Korea and Israel – all have reasons to be paranoid. They are menaced by their neighbours and don't know what form that menace will take, which is why they were quick on the draw while we were sitting on 36-page pandemic preparedness plans.

How would you like to change how we view disasters?
I'm fascinated by the idea that all disasters are the same, regardless of scale. At the heart of the 1986 *Challenger* disaster was the same recurrent feature of disasters through the ages – that the problem wasn't really at the top, but with middle management at Nasa. The engineers knew there was a 1 per cent probability that the space shuttle would blow up because of leaking fuel, but the bureaucrats decided that that probability was one in 100,000 because they didn't want to slow down the programme.

Lurking in all disasters, then, there's an obscure figure in a third-floor office whose name nobody can quite remember, who's getting it wrong. Whatever the nature of the disaster we're discussing, whether a global pandemic or the sinking of a ship, it's important to recognise that the point of failure is quite often somewhere in the middle. Indeed, the failure of middle-management, of bureaucracy is a recurrent leitmotif through the ages. We can't stop disasters from happening, but we need to learn about the dysfunctional quality of hierarchical bureaucracies – because until we have something more nimble, more responsive to changing circumstances and more open to input, we won't be able to manage them any better than we have Covid-19. H

"The failure of middle management, of bureaucracy, in disasters is a recurrent leitmotif through the ages"

Niall Ferguson is Milbank Family Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, and author of *Doom: The Politics of Catastrophe* (Allen Lane, 2021). Listen to an extended version of this interview on our podcast soon at *historyextra.com/podcast*

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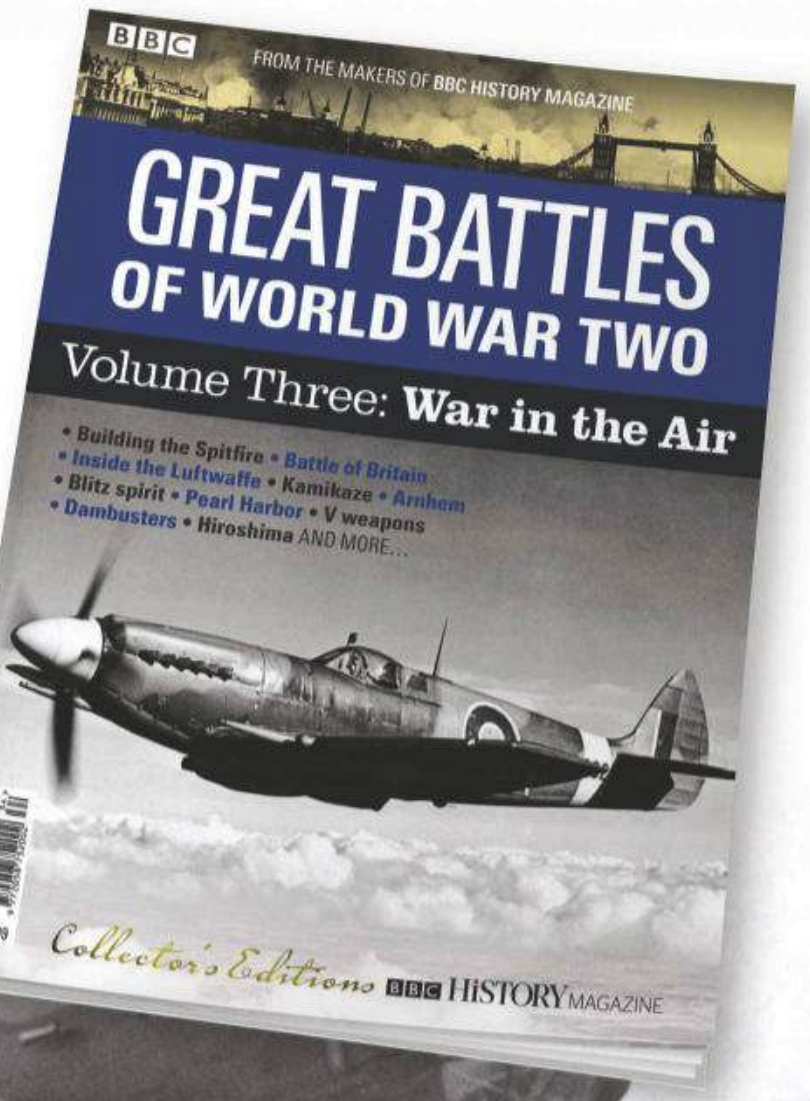
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Men of No 83 Squadron are all smiles as they pass a Handley Page Hampden bomber at RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire, October 1940

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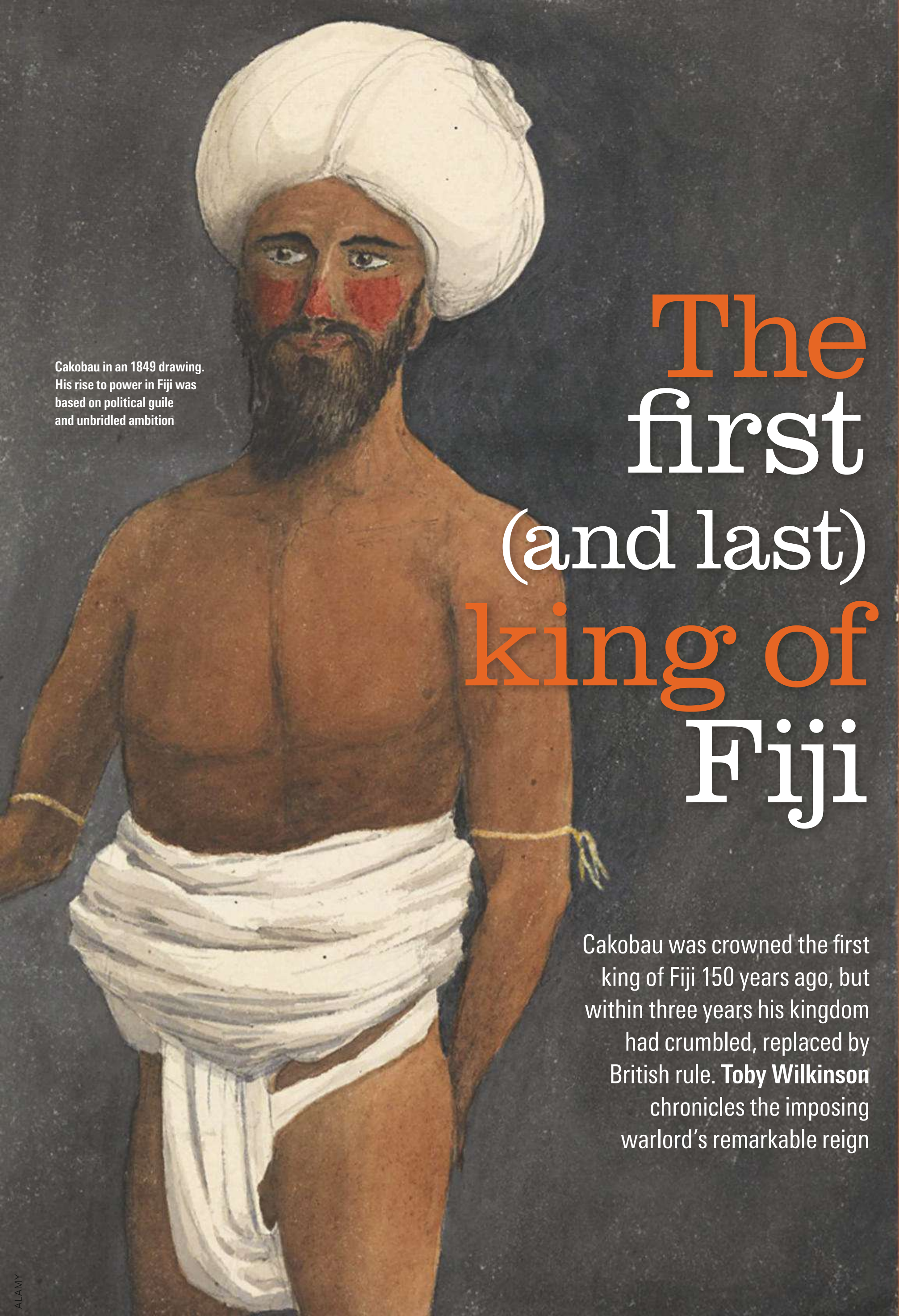


Cakobau in an 1849 drawing. His rise to power in Fiji was based on political guile and unbridled ambition

The first (and last) king of Fiji

Cakobau was crowned the first king of Fiji 150 years ago, but within three years his kingdom had crumbled, replaced by British rule. **Toby Wilkinson** chronicles the imposing warlord's remarkable reign

ALAMY

Last king of Fiji

On 5 June 1871, an unlikely ceremony took place in the ramshackle colonial settlement of Levuka, on the tropical island of Ovalau, at the heart of the Fiji archipelago. Before a motley crowd of European settlers – sugar-cane planters, gun-runners and the assorted jetsam of empire – and a few native Fijians, a tall and imposing local chief was proclaimed the king of Fiji.

The first and last person to bear that title, the man at the centre of proceedings was better known to his subjects as Cakobau (pronounced "Thakombau"). Born circa 1815, his personal journey, in the space of half a century, from cannibal to king to British subject, is one of the more incredible stories from the era of Pacific colonisation. As this year marks the 150th anniversary of his accession, it seems an appropriate moment to bring him back to life and tell his story anew.

The Fiji islands were first sighted by a European called Abel Tasman in 1643, but it was not until 1800 that western "civilisation" began to encroach on the traditional Fijian way of life. In the wake of sandalwood-traders, who stripped Fiji of much of its native forests, came the "beach-combers", outlaws who had fled justice in their home countries and come to live among the Fijians as gun-runners and interpreters. These ne'er-do-wells married local women and exercised a degree of influence over the native chiefs. In the early 19th century, Fiji comprised about a dozen major chiefdoms which, since long before European contact, had been engaged in endless internecine battles. The cannier rulers recognised the military advantage to be gained from western firearms and used them to pursue hegemony.

Foremost among these ambitious chiefs was the ruler of the tiny islet of Bau, located less than half a mile off the coast of Fiji's main island, Viti Levu. Measuring barely a mile in length, and covering an area of just 20 acres, Bau came to exercise a degree of influence out of all proportion to its size. Its rulers were famed as warriors – they bore the proud title of *vunivalu* ("warlord") – and they harried their neighbours relentlessly. All along the coastline of Bau, rock-built docks served the great war canoes that set out on regular expeditions to subdue the vunivalu's rivals.

Eating one's enemies

Bau's ascendancy began in 1832, when the island's unpredictable ruler, Tanoa, was deposed and fled into exile. That could have marked the end of his dynasty's rule, had it not been for the cunning and determination of his son, Cakobau. Pretending to side with the rebels, he secretly laid plans for a surprise attack. The result was Tanoa's restoration in 1837 (the year of Queen Victoria's accession), after which Tanoa reigned, but Cakobau ruled, pursuing political advantage with single-minded determination. In one respect, father and son were very alike: Tanoa had a penchant for human flesh (Mary Wallis, an American who wrote a book about her visits to Fiji with her husband from 1845 to 1849, described him, with gleeful horror, as "one of the greatest cannibals in Feejee"), and Cakobau shared his father's taste. The ovens of Bau were frequently filled with the enemies of the chief.

Some anthropologists have sought to deny the existence of cannibalism in Fiji (or indeed anywhere else), arguing that it was a figment of the western imagination, designed to degrade indigenous peoples and justify colonisation. But this ignores the weight of evidence from Fiji, including artefacts and multiple independent accounts. As the Fiji Museum itself explains: "Cannibalism was a normal and ritualised part of life, integral to Fijian religion and warfare." It was part of a complex culture where eating one's defeated enemies was "an act of vindictive vengeance reaching beyond the grave", and "the ultimate insult in a society based upon ancestor worship". Neither Tanoa nor Cakobau sought to deny cannibalism, rather asserting it as an integral part of their traditional customs.

A line engraving of a c1643 drawing showing the ships of Abel Tasman's expedition and Polynesian canoes near Tongatapu. It was at around this time that Tasman became the first European to sight nearby Fiji

Tanoa, Cakobau's father (shown in an 1840s drawing) was deposed, but his son's cunning saw him regain power

ALAMY

Our map shows Fiji's main island, Viti Levu, as well as the archipelago's location in the South Pacific Ocean. As king of Fiji, Cakobau nominally ruled over all the islands from 1871–74, though his power was uncertain at best

With the island of Bau at his feet, Cakobau intended to live up to his title as king of Fiji

ALAMY/MAP: PAUL HEWITT–BATTLEFIELD-DESIGN

Skulls that it is said belonged to people who were killed and consumed by cannibals in Narocake, Fiji. Eating the flesh of defeated enemies was "the ultimate insult" in Fijian society

Despite his predilections, Cakobau attracted the admiration of western visitors. Wallis found him "not destitute of dignity", and a fellow American called Charles Wilkes described him as "extremely good-looking, being tall, well made and athletic. He exhibits much intelligence both in his expression of countenance and manners. His features and figure resemble those of a European, and he is graceful and easy in his carriage."

The Napoleon of Fiji

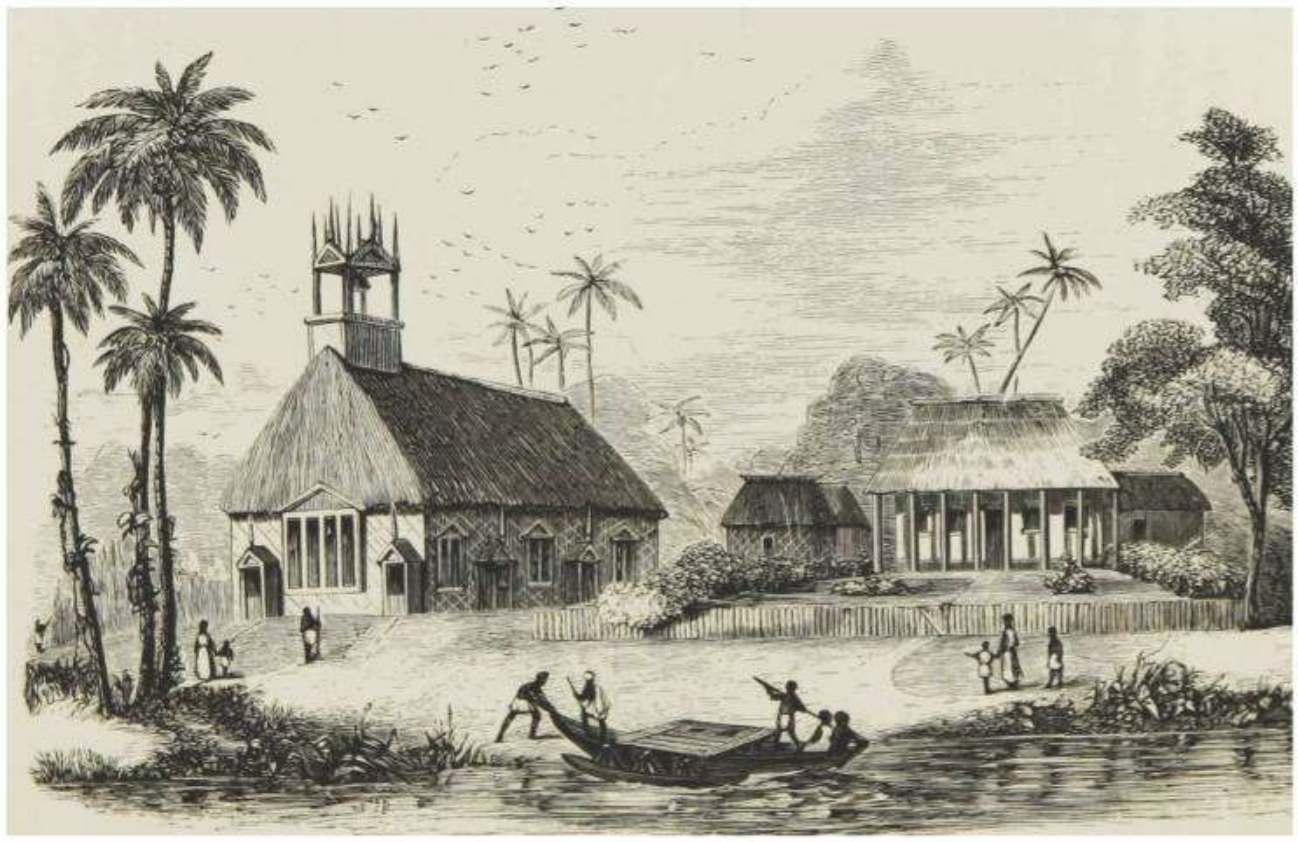
In his battles with neighbouring chiefdoms, Cakobau continued to enhance his reputation as a fierce and skilled warlord. Wallis declared: "I think that he may truly be called the Napoleon of Feejee." And western envoys found it increasingly convenient to focus on a single ruler with whom they could do business. For instance, in 1844 the British consul in Honolulu sent a letter to Cakobau in which he addressed him as *Tui Viti* ("King of Fiji").

In 1852, Tanoa died and Cakobau succeeded as vunivalu. With Bau and its subject territories at his feet, he fully intended to live up to his moniker as Tui Viti. Standing in his way, however, was a new group of white people recently arrived in the Fiji islands: missionaries. In the 1850s, the London Missionary Society was in full cry, and reports of cannibalism in Fiji fuelled their converting zeal. They were particularly focused on Bau, for, as their spokesman James Calvert explained: "The hearts of the missionaries were stirred because they saw here the centre and stronghold of all the horrors and abominations that darkened Fiji." Tanoa had been prepared to welcome the missionaries, but Cakobau was fiercely opposed. His resistance found unlikely support in the more dissolute elements of the white settler community, who, according to Calvert, "had reason to fear that their own licence would be restricted by the establishment of Christianity".

What eventually changed Cakobau's mind was not any amount of preaching by Wesleyan missionaries, but the disastrous prosecution of a war with neighbouring Rewa. Despite a steady flow of armaments, Bau had started to lose ground, and its ruler was beginning to contemplate defeat. Cakobau, whose rise to power seemed to have been ordained by the traditional gods, began to lose faith in the old religion. On 22 April 1854, the king received a letter from George Tupou I, the ruler of Tonga (an archipelago neighbouring Fiji), who had converted to Christianity, urging his Fijian counterpart to do likewise.

Just a few days later, Cakobau announced his decision to *lotu* ("convert"), and he did so at a service on Sunday 30 April. Three years later, he and his queen were publicly baptised. His conversion, swiftly emulated by many others across western Fiji, effectively brought to an end the old cultural system that had sparked the Bau–Rewa conflict and dozens like it.

With peace established, Cakobau's rapaciousness soon found new outlets. For example, on hearing that the kings of Tonga and Hawaii each had a ship, he ordered two. It was the beginning of a downward spiral of spending and debt. There were political troubles to contend with, too. For some time, Tonga had been expanding its sphere of influence in eastern Fiji, with the intention of subjugating the whole country. With pressures on his finances and threats to his throne, Cakobau began to wonder if the



A Christian church on the island of Bau. Although Cakobau had initially been fiercely opposed to the arrival of missionaries, he converted in April 1854. This sparked a wave of conversions across western Fiji

intervention of a foreign power might be his only salvation.

In 1858, he approached the British consul, offering Queen Victoria full sovereignty over Fiji. But the British were wary of taking control of a territory wracked by internal conflict and spiralling debts. London sent two commissioners to investigate and then dithered over a decision for four years. Eventually, in 1862, the British gave their answer: a polite refusal. But Cakobau was not wholly disappointed. In many ways, his move had worked. Attracted by the possibility of annexation, more British had settled in Fiji, reining in Tongan ambitions.

Meanwhile, the American Civil War had pushed up the price of cotton, leading to a surge in white planters in Fiji. By 1866, there were around 400 Europeans in the islands; their informal capital was Levuka on Ovalau, a place of industry and commerce, but also drunkenness, fights and racial discord. Relations were not helped by Cakobau's own attitude. He borrowed large amounts of money from the traders of Levuka to finance his lavish spending but took a haughty approach when asked to repay it. When one creditor had the temerity to press his case, Cakobau silenced him with the words: "I did not send for you. However, white men make good eating: they are like ripe bananas."

Cakobau silenced his creditors: "White men make good eating. They are like ripe bananas"

Royal ambitions

Eventually, the settlers lost patience. They demanded a government that would protect their property and recognise their rights. In 1865, they persuaded Cakobau and his fellow high chiefs to form a Confederacy of the Independent Chiefs of Fiji, with Cakobau as president. Within two years, however, it had unravelled. In its place, the settlers decided to create a kingdom of Bau. This suited Cakobau, who had not given up his ambitions to rule as a genuine Tui Viti.

His coronation as king of Bau on 2 May 1867 was a colourful and faintly ludicrous affair. The crown, created for the occasion for the princely sum of four-and-a-half dollars, was made of zinc, with a few decorative baubles. When placed upon Cakobau's immense coiffure it provoked laughter among the gathered assembly; only the king's natural air of authority and dignity prevented the occasion from descending into chaos. (Cakobau is said to have worn the crown only once before throwing it into the sea.)

The British consul at Levuka, too, was far from impressed. He warned British residents not to recognise the new regime. Without diplomatic support, the kingdom of Bau was doomed from the start. Pressure soon grew for a more stable, predictable government.

Matters worsened further in July 1867, when a Wesleyan missionary, Thomas Baker, was killed and eaten in a remote part of the main island of Viti Levu by villagers who despised both the new king of Bau and his new god. Cakobau had been powerless to stop the atrocity, highlighting the limits of his authority. The country was descending into chaos. In desperation, settlers in Levuka once more conspired with Cakobau, and on 5 June 1871 they proclaimed him king of Fiji.

The cotton planter John Bates Thurston. Cakobau convinced him to join his administration in 1871, and Thurston savvily navigated financial crises and settlers' demands to seize Fijian land

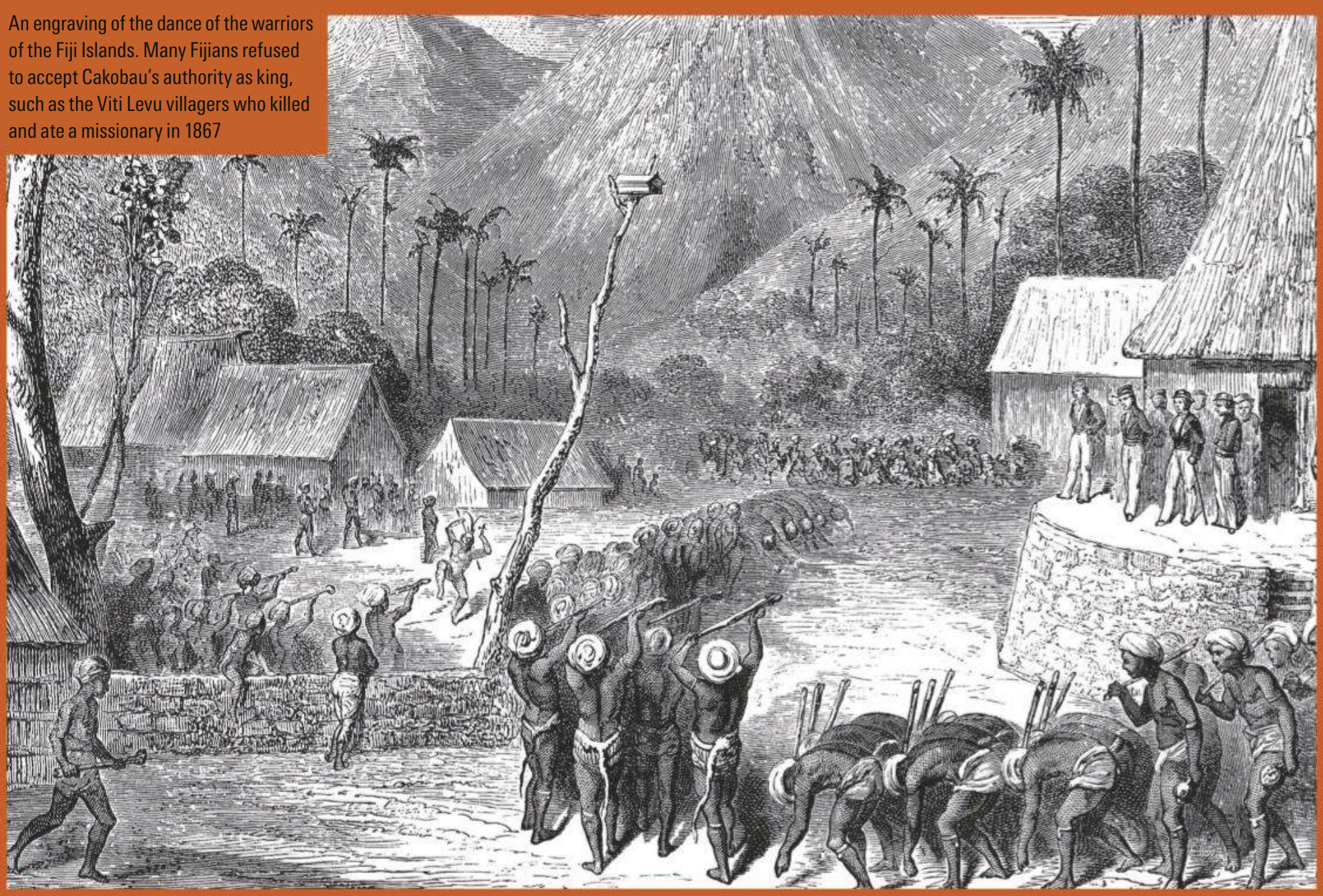
But changing the ruler's title changed nothing. Financial and political troubles beset the new regime on every side. With few options, Cakobau appealed to a British cotton planter, John Bates Thurston, to join his administration, first as chief secretary and later as acting premier. Thurston managed to navigate endless financial crises, and the settlers' demands to "open up" Fiji (by which they meant the appropriation of native land). However, by 1873, both Thurston and Cakobau had come to the conclusion that annexation by Britain offered the only long-term solution.

For the second time, a formal request was sent to London; it took the British nearly a year to decide to send two commissioners to investigate. Meanwhile, events in Fiji were moving fast. First, the government fell in a vote on the budget, and the king dissolved parliament. Then there were demonstrations in the streets of Levuka and tax revolts. Fiji's white settlers were now almost universally opposed to the administration they themselves had created. They ridiculed the king, calling him "Cockaboo Rex". Thurston, a man of unusually liberal views for the period, stood firm, believing that long-term justice for the Fijians outweighed the short-term interests of his fellow cotton-growers.

Eventually, the British commissioners

PUBLIC DOMAIN/ALAMY

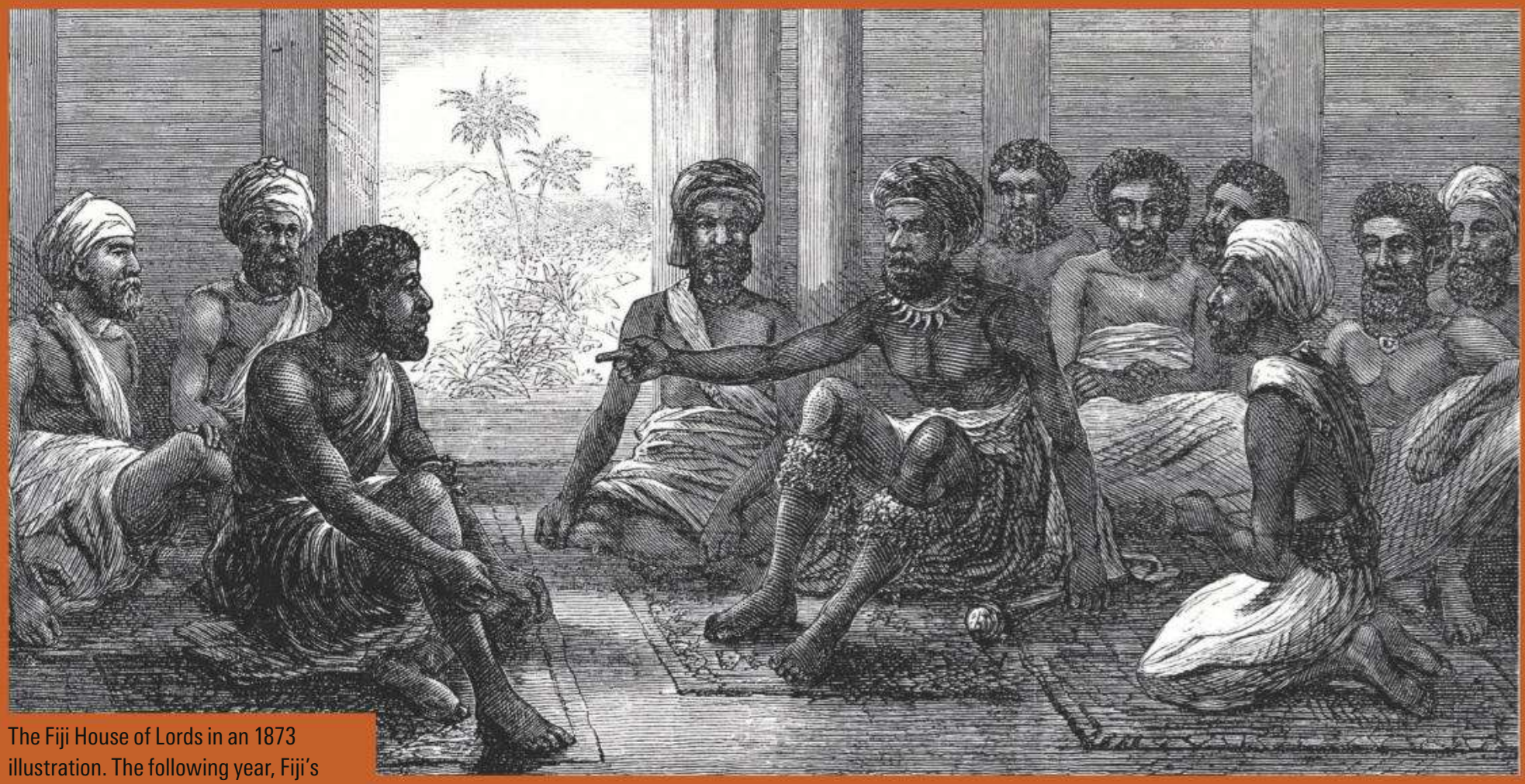
A copy of a portrait of Cakobau made during a c1858 survey of the Fiji Islands. When he was king of Bau, and later Fiji, his kingdom was beset by serious financial and political troubles that he found impossible to fix



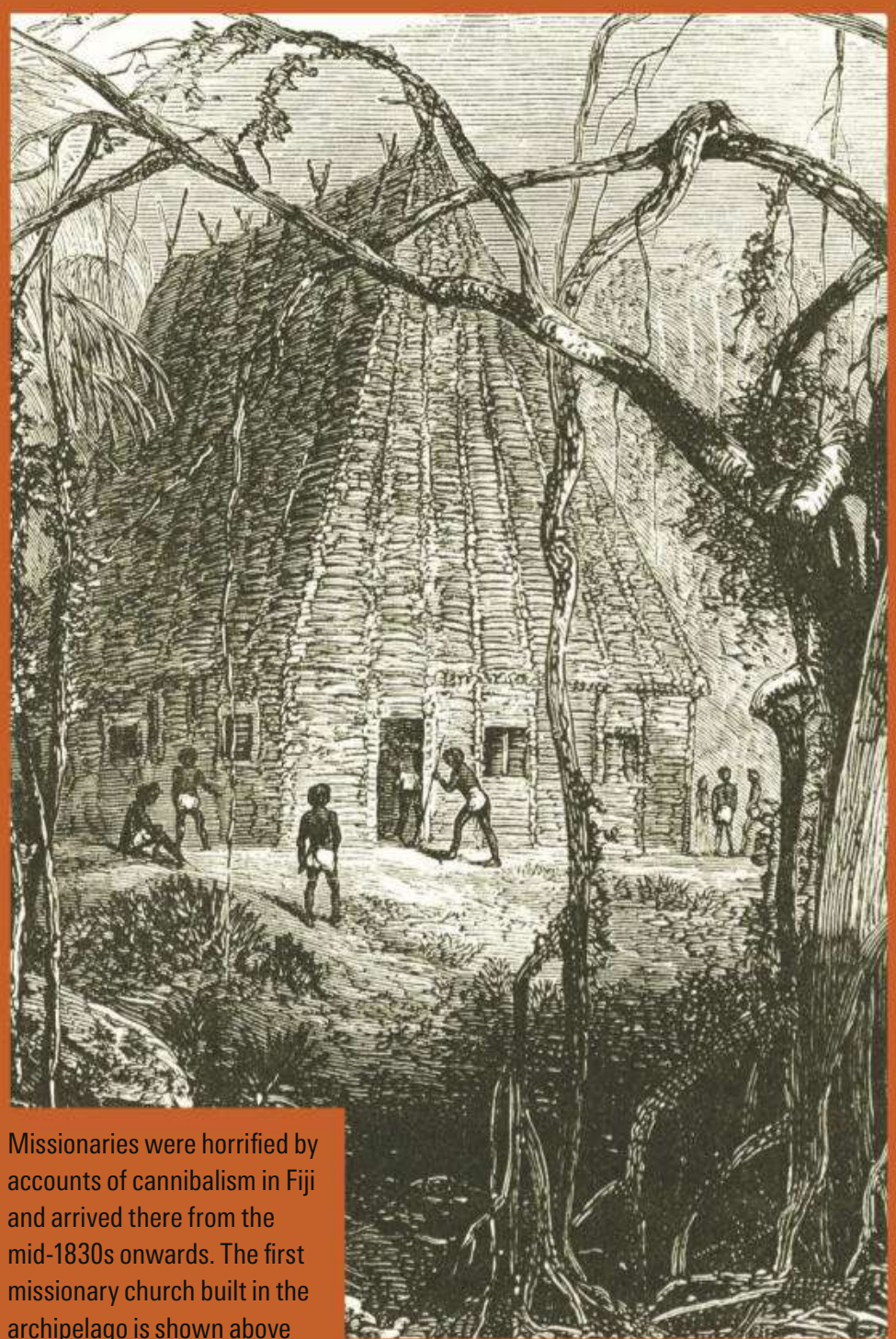
An engraving of the dance of the warriors of the Fiji Islands. Many Fijians refused to accept Cakobau's authority as king, such as the Viti Levu villagers who killed and ate a missionary in 1867

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY

Last king of Fiji



The Fiji House of Lords in an 1873 illustration. The following year, Fiji's rulers formally ceded the archipelago to Britain, in the hopes that Queen Victoria would "rule Fiji justly and affectionately"



Missionaries were horrified by accounts of cannibalism in Fiji and arrived there from the mid-1830s onwards. The first missionary church built in the archipelago is shown above

A Fijian man, c1893. In the years after annexation, Fijian land, law-making rights and culture were protected, which was in contrast to Britain's treatment of a number of its other colonies

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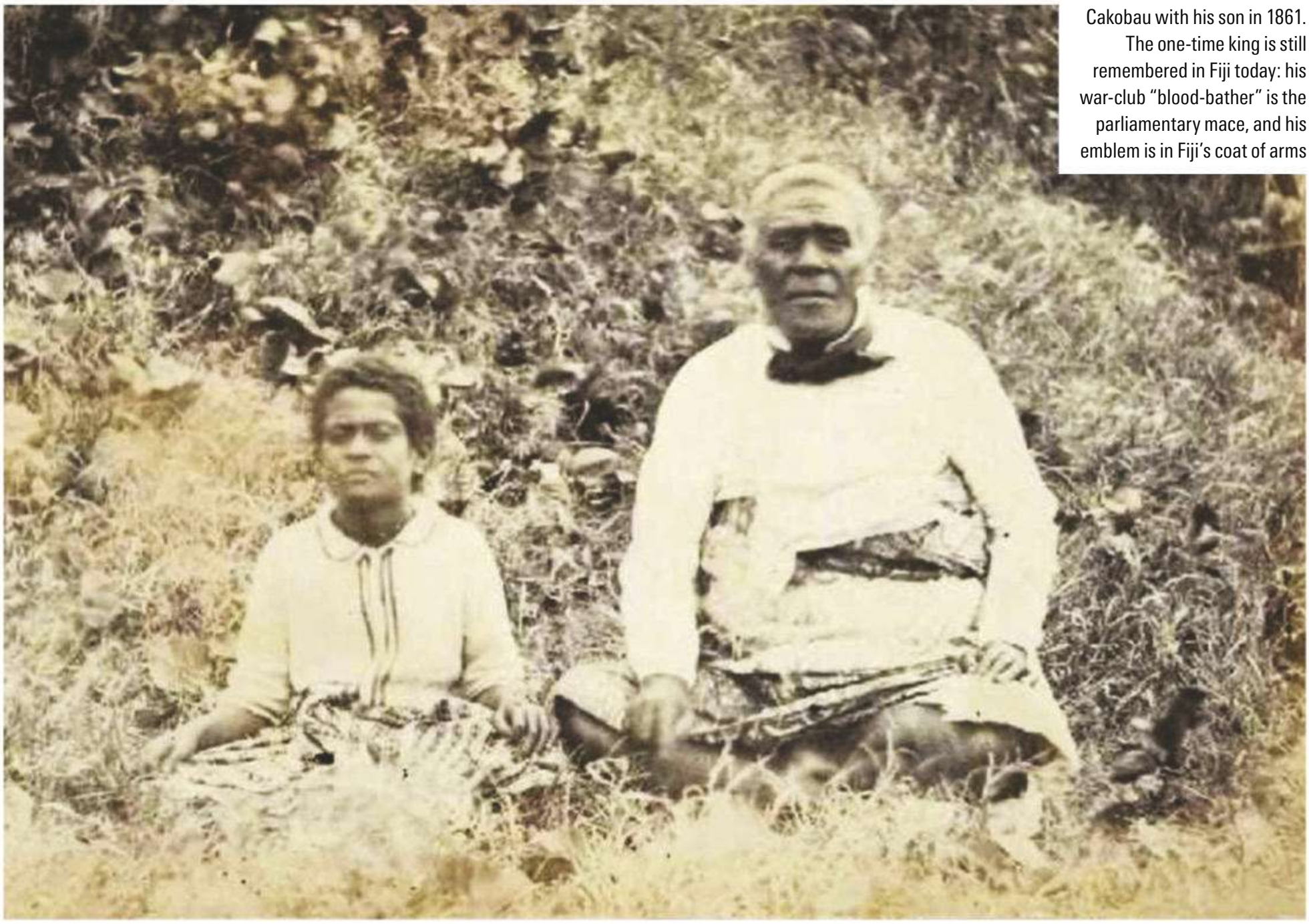

Cakobau with his son in 1861. The one-time king is still remembered in Fiji today: his war-club "blood-bather" is the parliamentary mace, and his emblem is in Fiji's coat of arms

ALAMY

were forced to accept the logic of cession. Cakobau explained, poignantly: "If matters remain as they are, Fiji will become like a piece of driftwood on the sea, and be picked up by the first passer-by… By annexation the two races, white and black, will be bound together… and the stronger nation will lend strength to the weaker."

In September 1874, the governor of New South Wales arrived at Levuka to make the final arrangements. On 10 October, in the Council Room on Ovalau, the final signatures were added to the Deed of Cession. The signatories were Cakobau, 11 other high chiefs and a Tongan prince. Cakobau's proclamation left no room for doubt: "Unto Her Majesty the Queen of Britain – We, King of Fiji, together with other high chiefs of Fiji, hereby give our country, Fiji, unreservedly to Her Britannic Majesty Queen of Great Britain and Ireland; and we trust and repose fully in her, that she will rule Fiji justly and affectionately… Signed: Cakobau R., Tui Viti and Vunivalu."

The independent kingdom of Fiji had lasted just three years.

A century of colonialism

For the next century, Fiji was a colonial possession of Britain. But thanks to Thurston, who served under the first governor and eventually became governor himself, Fijians' land and their rights to make their own laws were protected, and the native Fijians retained their culture, faring better than most colonised peoples. Britain was able to showcase Fiji as a model colony (in fact, it was the exception, not the rule). Cakobau's wisdom in choosing Thurston as his chief political aide was perhaps his greatest legacy to Fiji.

The native Fijians retained their culture, faring better than most colonised peoples

Cakobau shaped his country in other ways, too. Because of Bau's pre-eminence during the crucial years of conversion and colonisation, its dialect, just one of about 30 main tongues spoken across the archipelago, was adopted by the church and the press. This standardisation helped ensure the survival of Fijian as a language into the 21st century.

Cakobau remains a visible presence in Fiji today. In front of the parliament building on Victoria Parade, a seated statue of the king of Fiji commemorates the Act of Cession. At that ceremony, he presented his favourite war-club, known as the "blood-bather", to Queen Victoria's representative. Many decades later, it was given back to the Fijian people. Today, somewhat embellished, it serves as the parliamentary mace.

The vunivalu of Bau is still held in high esteem, and Bau itself is accorded a special sanctity as a royal island and heartland of Fijian culture. Cakobau's emblem, the white dove of peace (an unusual choice for a warlord and cannibal), retains its place in the Fijian coat of arms. And, 150 years after Cakobau's coronation, his regal motto, *Rerevaka na kalou ka doka na tui* ("Fear God and honour the king"), remains the national motto of the Republic of Fiji. H

Toby Wilkinson is vice-chancellor and professor of history at the Fiji National University, a bye fellow of Clare College Cambridge, and a fellow of the Royal Historical Society

Mary Wortley Montagu
The scourge of smallpox

That humanity won its battle with smallpox is in no small part down to the resilience of a woman who pioneered inoculation in 18th-century Britain, in the teeth of tremendous resistance. **JO WILLETT** reveals how Mary Wortley Montagu changed the course of medical history

In April 1721, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was shut up in Twickenham with her two children for company. A smallpox pandemic was raging. She sent out servants daily to glean the names of those dead from the disease. Mary had narrowly escaped death herself when she had contracted smallpox five years before, and she had also lost her beloved only brother, William, to it.

Yet Lady Mary knew of a means of protection against a disease that, across the centuries, has killed hundreds of millions and disfigured many more. After she recovered from smallpox, her husband, Edward Wortley Montagu, was made ambassador to the Ottoman empire. And it was during her family's 15-month residency in Constantinople that Lady Mary was introduced to a treatment that, with her help, would alter the course of medical history. It was called inoculation.

While her husband was away on ambassadorial business, Mary ensured that their only son was inoculated by a little old Greek woman with no medical training. "She puts into the vein as much venom as can lye upon the head of her needle, and after binds up the little wound with a hollow bit of shell," Mary wrote of the procedure.

Inoculating her son in Turkey was a very different thing from protecting her only daughter – who was also called Mary – back in England. No one in a western country had ever been inoculated. But when, two years after the family returned home, a severe epidemic swept Britain, she knew she had to take action.

> "Lady Mary predicted that she would have to 'war' with the medical establishment, and she was right"

Mary wrote to the Scottish surgeon Charles Maitland, who had accompanied the Wortley Montagus to Turkey, summoning him to Twickenham. Maitland knew what Mary was planning, even if her letter to him would have been somewhat cryptic, for fear of interception. He was much more nervous than her about the plan. He might have hoped to enlist the support of Mary's husband, but Edward was in London on parliamentary business.

Eventually, after a week of heated debate, Mary persuaded Maitland to take action. He was sent out to collect a small amount of smallpox matter from someone nearby. Together Mary and Maitland then opened some wounds in little Mary's arms and legs and, using a surgeon's needle, introduced into them a tiny amount of smallpox pus.

Ten days later little Mary started to run the fever and show the very few spots associated with inoculated smallpox. She was put to bed, but recovered within two or three days. Maitland had insisted that three members of the prestigious Royal College of Physicians come to observe the little girl, who smiled contentedly at them while her mother kept protective guard at the door.

One of these physicians, Dr James Keith, had lost his two eldest sons to smallpox. He asked if his only surviving son could be inoculated as well. Honoured, Dr Maitland agreed. Dr Keith was a physician, not a humble surgeon like Maitland, and so his son was bled and purged before being inoculated. Mary had seen for herself in Turkey that none of this bleeding and purging (which invariably further weakened patients) was necessary. She would always oppose this medicalisation of the process.

In fact, it was the misery Edward Jenner endured when he was bled and purged before inoculation that spurred him on to come up with the concept of vaccination (introducing a small sample of *another* disease to the body of a patient) rather than inoculation (introducing a sample of that same disease) in the 1790s. Jenner would use cowpox from cows rather than smallpox matter from humans as a more effective and safer form of protection. But he would never have made the mental leap from smallpox to cowpox without Lady Mary's pioneering work nearly 80 years earlier.

Looks of dislike

Lady Mary was born in London in 1689, the eldest child of aristocratic parents, Evelyn Pierrepont, later Duke of Kingston-upon-Hull, and his wife Mary Feilding.

Mary may have been born into privilege but her gender meant that she could take little credit for her scientific breakthrough. It also meant that she was barred from the Royal Society, England's famed academy of sciences, further stymieing her attempts to gain official support for inoculation. Instead she spread the word among her friends and, over the next few years, spent her time travelling between aristocratic households across the country,

LETTERS
Of the RIGHT HONOURABLE
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ILLUSTRATION BY **ROSEMARY SMITH**

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

inoculating everyone who consented. At times the demand for her services felt overpowering. One of her most prominent supporters was Caroline of Ansbach, wife of the future George II. Impressed with Mary's work, Caroline had her own children inoculated as a result.

Yet not everyone welcomed her with open arms. Back in Turkey, Mary had predicted that she would need to "war" with the medical establishment were she to bring inoculation to England. She could see that doctors – fearful of losing the fees incurred by repeated visits to smallpox sufferers' bedsides – would resist its introduction. Few medics, she later lamented, were virtuous enough to "destroy such a considerable branch of their revenue for the good of mankind".

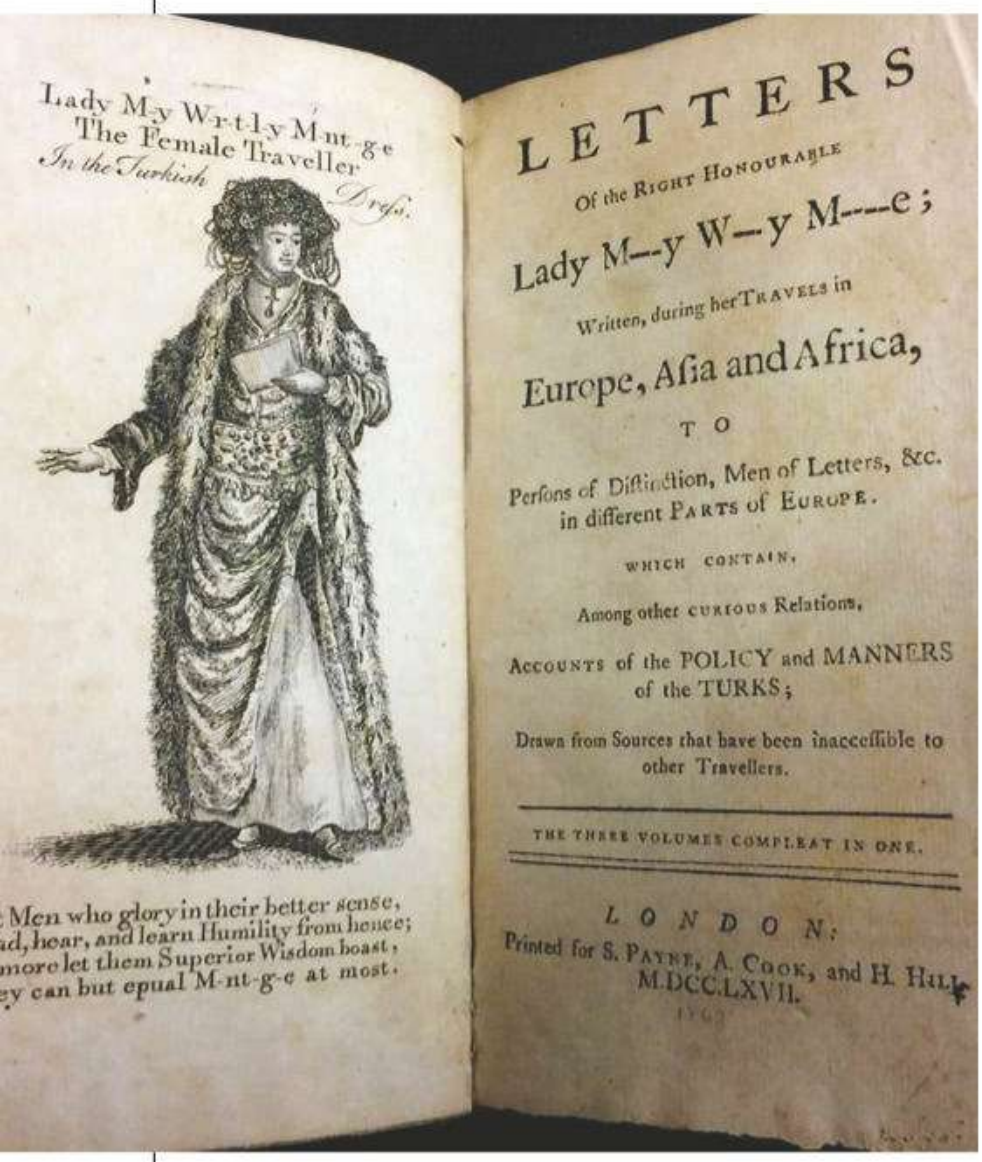
And resistance wasn't limited to the medical establishment. Her daughter Mary, who often travelled with her on these inoculation trips, remembered the "looks of dislike", and the "the significant shrugs of nurse and servants" when mother and daughter arrived in their carriage.

The process of inoculation soon became politicised, with the Whig party in favour and the Tory party against. The Tories' argument was that inoculation took people who were well and made them ill. After Lady Mary inoculated her daughter, an experiment was carried out on six prisoners at Newgate gaol. They were inoculated and promised their freedom if they survived. When the prisoners did indeed prove that the process was safe, the newspapers opposed the idea that they should be given their liberty. Meanwhile, clergy preached from their pulpits against what they saw as inoculation's meddling with the will of God.

Lady Mary met opposition even within her own family. Her sister Lady Gower refused to have her own son William inoculated – only for him to die from the disease.

A defence of divorce

Mary displayed similar courage in other areas of her life as she had in the inoculation battle. She was a feminist before the word was even invented: in a succession of impassioned


Lady M-y W-tl-y M-nt-g-e
The Female Traveller
In the Turkish Dress.
Men who glory in their better sense,
ad, hear, and learn Humility from hence;
more let them Superior Wisdom boast,
ey can but epual M-nt-g-e at most.
LETTERS
Of the RIGHT HONOURABLE
Lady M--y W--y M---e;
Written, during her TRAVELS in
Europe, Asia and Africa,
TO
Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters, &c.
in different PARTS of EUROPE.
WHICH CONTAIN,
Among other CURIOUS Relations,
ACCOUNTS of the POLICY and MANNERS
of the TURKS;
Drawn from Sources that have been inaccessible to
other Travellers.
THE THREE VOLUMES COMPLEAT IN ONE.
LONDON:
Printed for S. PAYNE, A. COOK, and H. HALL
M.DCC.LXVII.

The title page from a book of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters "during her travels to Europe, Asia and Africa", in which she described the smallpox inoculations she'd witnessed in Constantinople

A 19th-century painting shows Edward Jenner performing the first vaccination against smallpox, 75 years after Montagu's inoculations

A vaccine monster consumes infants in a c1802 coloured etching. It is estimated that over half of those who died from smallpox in 18th-century Europe were children

letters and poems she highlighted the plight of women who had suffered at the hands of their husbands. "Too, too severely laws of honour bind, The weak submissive sex of woman-kind," she observed in one poem. She even advocated "a general act of divorcing all the people of England" – which would have given all married couples the right to divorce every few years – on the grounds that it would save money and plenty of heartache, too.

As a young woman, Mary was herself destined for a marriage arranged by her father. Yet she chose to elope with Edward Wortley Montagu instead. Then, at the age of 47, when her marriage to Montagu had turned stale, she fell for a 24-year-old Italian called Francesco Algarotti. Unbeknown to Mary, Algarotti was the lover of her friend Lord John Hervey – and, though Mary and Algarotti were to live together briefly in Turin, the relationship was over in just a couple of months. Mary stayed on in Europe by herself for more than 20 years, before returning to London where she died in 1762.

> "Mary was unaware that the man she had fallen for was in a relationship with her friend Lord John Hervey"

Today, 250 years after her death, for all her passionate feminism and colourful private life, Lady Mary is primarily remembered for being the first Briton to prove that inoculation was safe and practicable. Edward Jenner invariably receives the plaudits for finding a cure for smallpox. And yet without Mary's decision in that house in Twickenham 300 years ago, the elimination of this deadly disease – which was not fully realised until the 1970s – might never have been achieved.

As the French philosopher Voltaire put it: "At least 10,000 children of good family thus owe their lives to the Queen [Caroline] and Lady Wortley Montagu, and as many girls are indebted to them for their beauty." H

Jo Willett's book *The Pioneering Life of Mary Wortley Montagu: Scientist and Feminist* (2021) is published by Pen & Sword. You can hear her talk about Mary Wortley Montagu on a recent episode of the HistoryExtra podcast: *historyextra.com/podcast*

LISTEN Naomi Alderman discusses Lady Montagu on BBC Radio 4's **Science Stories**: *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0001v84*

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Dubrovnik, Croatia, which you can visit on Marella's Adriatic Affair cruise

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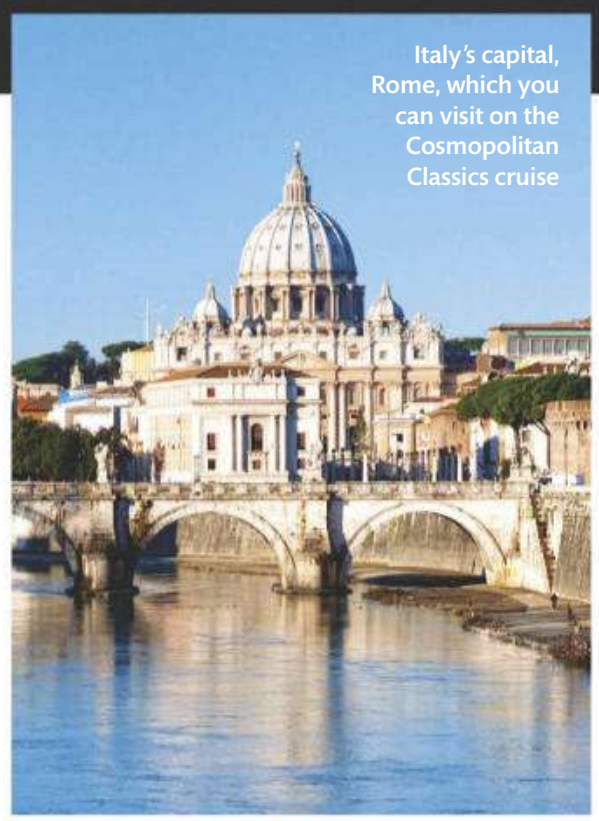

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BATTING FOR THE BR

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ITISH EMPIRE

Prodigious talent
The England team that faced Australia at the Oval in the 1896 Ashes series, led by WG Grace (centre). Pictured middle row, second left is Ranjitsinhji, a product of one of India's elite families

For Victorian imperialists, cricket was more than just a game, it was a means of exporting English virtues across the globe. But how, asks **Souvik Naha**, did this great "civilising mission" go down with the colonised peoples?

A strange letter was published in *The Times* on 25 June 1968. The writer, DM Brittain from Aberdeen, said: "Now I know that this country is finished. On Saturday, with Australia playing, I asked a London cabby to take me to Lord's [cricket ground], and had to show him the way."

The letter summed up the growing anxiety about a rapidly changing world in which the British empire had lost its prestige, and people with little interest in cricket drove cabs in the capital city. If cricket was no longer central to British identity, Brittain reasoned, what hope was there for the future of the nation?

Cricket has been a marker of English identity for two centuries. It is the "most exalted icon", as one scholar has written, of "theme park heritage Englishness". In order to be England's national game, cricket had to be English in origin and character (though it may have evolved from games in France and the Netherlands). And when Englishmen travelled the world to forge an empire, they took their "national" game with them.

It was the Victorians who wove a distinctive English imprint into cricket by trumpeting the virtues of fair play, equanimity and loyalty – all of which they hailed as the building blocks of British democracy and empire. The timeless, leisurely nature of cricket in the mid-19th century was imbued with the wistful imagery of a bucolic past set in contrast with the industrial present, rooting the sport strongly within English history and culture. And this was an ideal to which Victorians were introduced at the

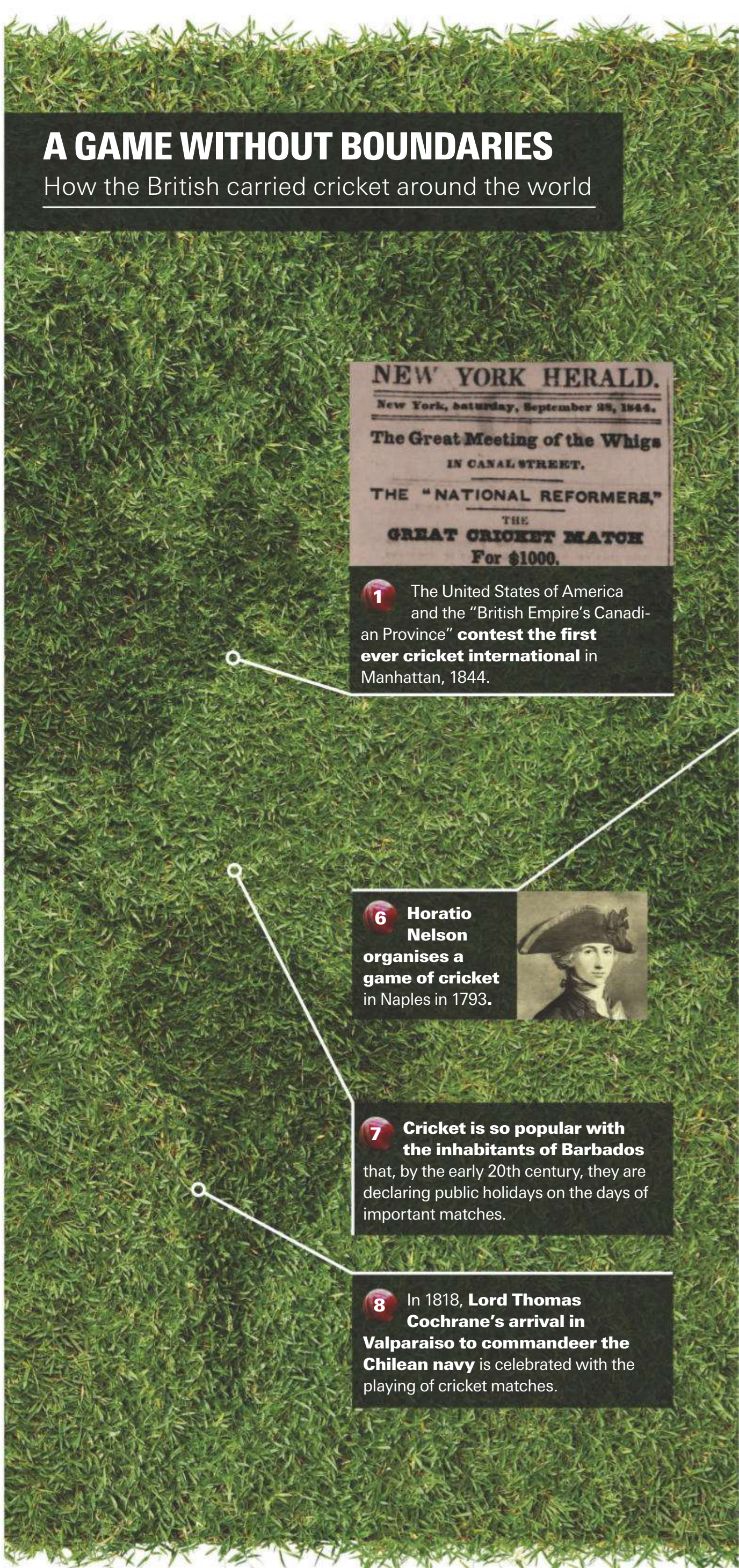
youngest of ages. The public school system mythologised the sport as the ultimate lesson in morals, justice, religion and life itself. By playing cricket, boys – and later girls, non-Christians, and colonial people – would become exemplary citizens of the British empire. "Give me a boy who is a cricketer and I can make something of him," said George Ridding, headmaster of Winchester College.

In the contest between bat and ball, social and cultural leaders from the mid-19th century to the end of the Second World War found the answer to every social problem, including health and illiteracy. In Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, a school-teacher emphasised the importance of discipline, teamwork and putting one's team's interest ahead of oneself. Just as you should not dissent the umpire's decision, so you must not question the nation and the empire. Adopting such a mindset was seen as the perfect preparation for imperial administrative and military functions.

If this vision of a sport in sync with the ideal society was to succeed, cricket had to be depicted as central to England's character – the nation's lifeblood. A cartoon published in *The Star* newspaper days before Christmas in 1920, titled "The Relative Importance of Things", showed the discussion about cricket, even in off-season, towering above Christmas, the weather, the latest divorces, and politics in the pecking order. Neville Cardus, the celebrated writer and critic, made a sweeping claim that "if everything else in this nation of ours was lost but cricket… it would be possible to reconstruct from the theory and practice of cricket all the eternal Englishness which has gone to the establishment of that constitution…"

In the age of empire, when Britons were busily exporting their values across the globe, it didn't take long for the nationalist and imperial sensibility associated with cricket to be transferred to British colonies. Homesick colonials played cricket wherever they went.

JUST AS YOU WERE TOLD NOT TO DISSENT THE UMPIRE'S DECISION, SO YOU COULDN'T QUESTION THE EMPIRE


A GAME WITHOUT BOUNDARIES
How the British carried cricket around the world
NEW YORK HERALD.
New York, Saturday, September 28, 1844.
The Great Meeting of the Whigs
IN CANAL STREET.
THE "NATIONAL REFORMERS,"
THE
GREAT CRICKET MATCH
For $1000.
1 The United States of America and the "British Empire's Canadian Province" contest the first ever cricket international in Manhattan, 1844.
6 Horatio Nelson organises a game of cricket in Naples in 1793.
7 Cricket is so popular with the inhabitants of Barbados that, by the early 20th century, they are declaring public holidays on the days of important matches.
8 In 1818, Lord Thomas Cochrane's arrival in Valparaiso to commandeer the Chilean navy is celebrated with the playing of cricket matches.

ALAMY/NEW YORK CITY ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

2 **In 1899, Khartoum hosts Sudan's first reported game of cricket**, as depicted in the drawing (right). Across the empire, colonialists employed the game as a tool with which to educate non-white natives.

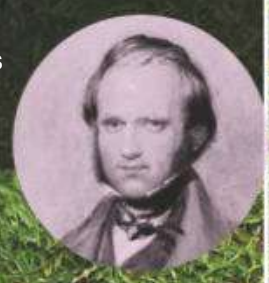
3 **In 1721 a group of British seamen reportedly play cricket** while their ship is anchored at the Bay of Cambay in western India.

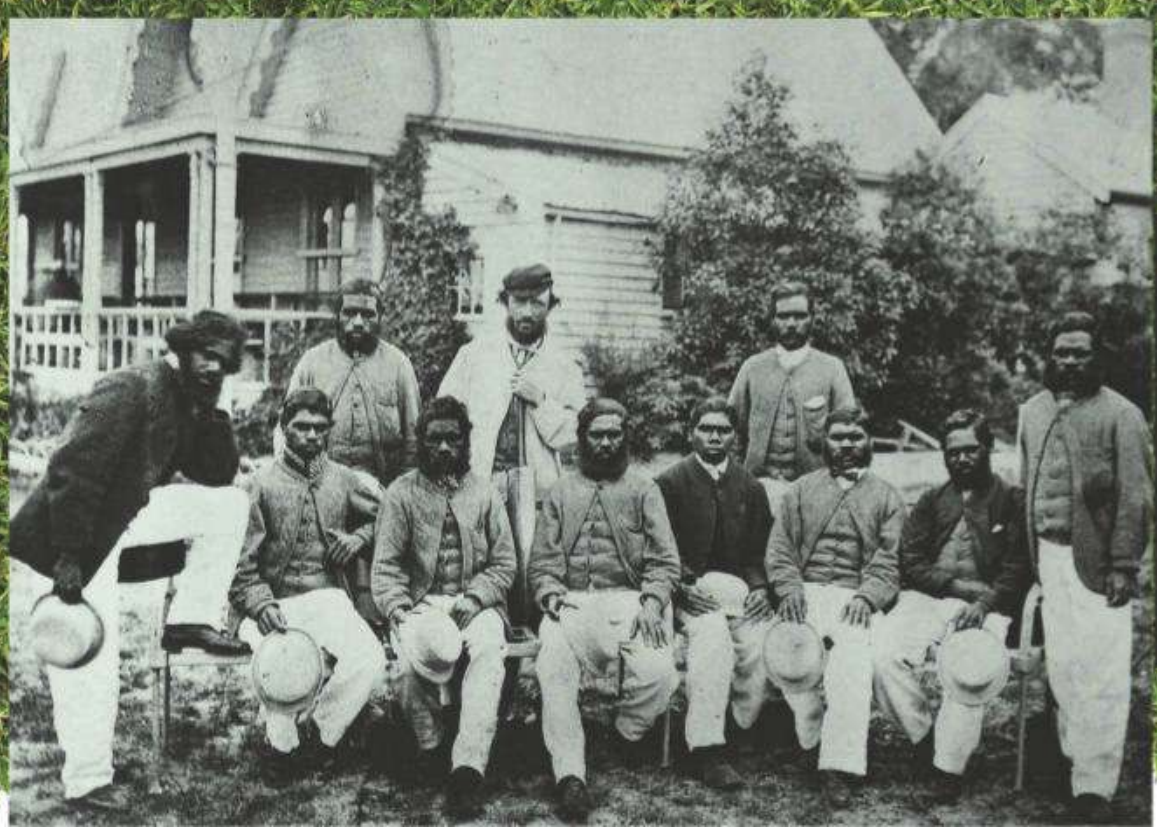
4 In Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1926, the **Indian batsman CK Nayudu smashes 153 in just two hours against a touring MCC side.** One onlooker likens each shot to a nail in the coffin of the empire.

5 **The British Army founds a cricket club in Shanghai in 1858.** Alexandria (1851) and Singapore (1852) are among the other locations to gain clubs courtesy of the British military.

9 **In 1879, two British schoolmasters in Ceylon (Sri Lanka)** inaugurate an annual match between Royal College, Colombo, and St Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia. The fixture is still being played 142 years later.

11 In 1835, **Charles Darwin witnesses a game of cricket being played by freed Maori slaves** at Waimate North in New Zealand.





10 **In 1868, a group of Aboriginal Australians become the first cricketers to tour England.** They are followed by two Parsis teams in the 1880s, and an all-India team in 1911. (The image, left, shows an Aboriginal team in Australia, 1866).

Cricket's colonial crusaders

In 1721, a group of British seamen reportedly played cricket while their ship was anchored at the Bay of Cambay in Western India. The writer Horace Walpole, who hated cricket, witnessed a match in Paris in 1766. Horatio Nelson organised a game in Naples in 1793.

The earliest players were chiefly members of the armed forces. In the West Indies, the first known reference to cricket is from a match between two garrisons in 1806, and the British Army founded clubs everywhere from Rangoon (now Yangon) in 1825 and Buenos Aires (1831) to Shanghai (1858). In 1818, Lord Thomas Cochrane's arrival in Valparaiso to commandeer the Chilean navy in their war of independence against Spain was celebrated with "grand dinners, cricket-matches, races and picnic parties".

Cricket may now have been played across the globe, but it was still viewed as a white man's sport. When Indian soldiers in the British Army started playing for regiment teams in the 1830s, they were hardly welcomed with open arms. Rather, cricket helped the white soldiers self-differentiate from the imitative "natives". A regiment in India, when pressed hard to play against a Parsi club, agreed to do so on the condition that the match be played as "officers with umbrellas versus natives with bats".

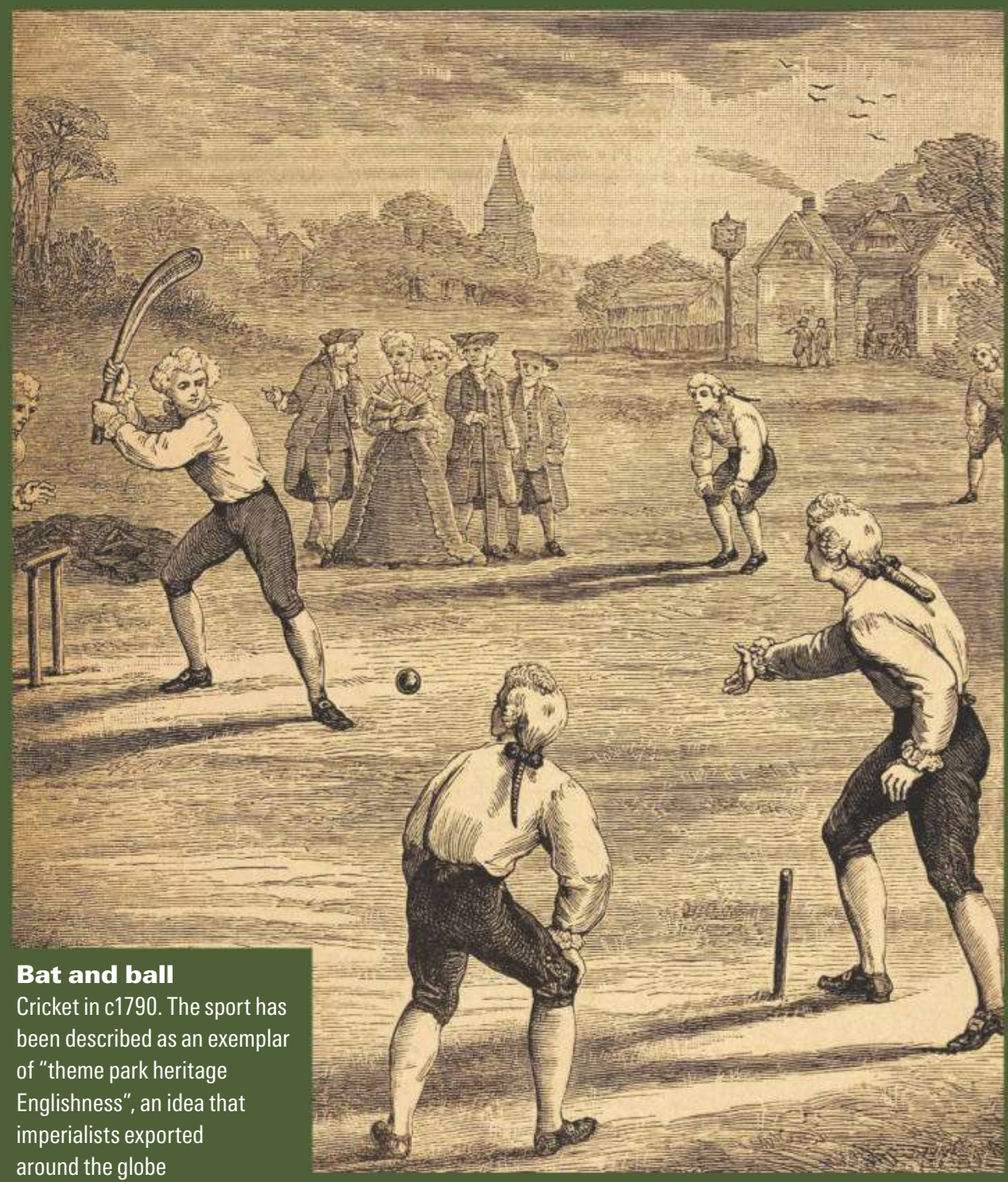
It was a similar story in the West Indies, where black people would have to wait until 1895 before being included in any competitive match. In the same decade, Barbados refused to play Trinidad in the Challenge Cup if black players were selected.

Civilising mission

Yet just as white soldiers in the outposts of empire sought to exclude locals from cricket, British politicians were increasingly tuning in to the game's potential as a conduit of imperial solidarity. Cricket, they thought, could serve as a unique cultural bond between the coloniser and the colonised.

Colonialism, a matter of great pride for the British ruling elite, brought with it – in their eyes, at least – a moral obligation. They regarded empire-building as a "civilising mission". And what could educate the non-white natives better than cricket?

British governors in India such as Lord Harris and Lord Brabourne patronised the sport in the hope that it might "bond together India's religiously, linguistically and ethnically diverse population". For them and others, however, the proliferation of cricket among the "inferior other" served to buttress the empire's white supremacist agenda. It was thought that the "excitable Asiatic" was at a disadvantage to the "phlegmatic Anglo-Saxon" on the field of play. And while the English nature was the perfect harmony of mind and



Bat and ball Cricket in c1790. The sport has been described as an exemplar of "theme park heritage Englishness", an idea that imperialists exported around the globe

Leg before wicket A batter at the crease in the Trobriand Islands off the coast of Papua New Guinea in 2009. No sooner had British missionaries introduced the sport in the early 20th century than the islanders were making their own modifications to the game, expanding the number of players and incorporating dance and song into proceedings

GETTY IMAGES

body, black West Indians possessed "brute physicality" and "oriental" people had intelligence without physical prowess.

Arguably, cricket's most enthusiastic patrons were Christian missionaries. Charles Darwin saw a match played by freed Maori slaves, led by the son of one such missionary, at Waimate North in New Zealand in 1835. When missionaries introduced cricket to the Trobriand Islands off the coast of Papua New Guinea, the natives gave it their own distinctive spin, expanding the number of players, adding dance and song, and modifying the bat.

CRICKET HAD NOW BECOME A WEAPON TO PROTEST AGAINST COLONIAL RULE AND BEAT THE COLONISERS AT THEIR OWN GAME

Distinguished players

From Shanghai to Samoa, colonists used cricket to spread the word of God by reshaping the pastimes – and, by extension, the mentalities – of the non-believing natives. This propagation took place mainly in schools and colleges that aimed to replicate the English public school ethos in the colonies. These establishments were attended by scions of some of the more influential families of the region, who took a lead in popularising cricket among the masses. Ranjitsinhji, who played for England (from 1896–1902) with distinction and later became the Jam Sahib (titular prince) of Nawanagar, is the most famous product of this system. In 1879, two Cambridge-educated British schoolmasters in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) started an annual match between Colombo Academy (now Royal College) and St Thomas' College. The fixture is still played today, making it among the world's oldest school-cricket derbies.

But not all colonists saw it as their mission to spread the word about the sport. In Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, white settlers largely distanced themselves from local influence, as well as local cricket. These conclaves of whiteness were presided over by politicians, military officers and rich businessmen – a fact that's reflected in the titles of the domestic first-class tournament trophies: Sheffield Shield (Australia), after British Conservative politician Henry Holroyd, Earl of Sheffield; Plunket Shield, presented by British diplomat Lord William Plunket (New Zealand); and South Africa's Currie Cup, donated by Scottish shipowner Sir Donald Currie.

For Australians, cricket generated a sense of exclusive, racialised nationalism, which enabled them to self-identify as citizens of the British world but not necessarily subjects of the empire. Beating England in cricket nurtured a sense of national belonging among the colonial officials, guards, convicts and free settlers in Australia. At the same time, those with English ancestry could celebrate their Englishness in the field of play.

After Australia's emergence as a self-governing Dominion, its national identity was expressed even more powerfully with bat and ball. The "Bodyline" series of 1932–33, in which England's bowlers adopted the infamous tactic of directing short, fast deliveries at the bodies of the Australian batsmen, strained the two countries' diplomatic relationship to breaking point.

Cricket's power to shape diplomacy was exploited no less potently by indigenous groups. Indian princes, in particular, patronised the sport as a means to ingratiate themselves with the British rulers. Partly due to their participation, the late 19th and first half of the 20th century saw an explosion of British cricket tours to a variety of destinations, including, of course, India itself. And this was far from one-way traffic. When a party of Australian Aboriginal cricketers arrived in London in 1868, they were merely paving the way for a succession of indigenous cricketing tourists to England – including two Parsis teams in the 1880s, and an all-India team in 1911.

By the second quarter of the 20th century, the relationship between the colonisers and colonised was beginning to change. Far from viewing cricket as a means to impress the imperial authorities, the Indian and Caribbean middle classes were now employing it as a tool to resist British criticism of their masculinity. The sport became a symbolic weapon to protest the inequality of colonial rule. When, in 1926, CK Nayudu hit 153 in two hours, including 11 sixes, against a touring side representing the MCC (cricket's London-based governing body), one spectator thought each shot was a nail in the coffin of the empire.

Almost a century on, the empire is still woven into cricket's fabric. While cricket retains its power to captivate players, journalists and spectators across the globe, that power is restricted to a handful of nations, most of whom are former British dominions. It's hardly surprising then that, three centuries after a British seaman produced a bat and ball and challenged his companions to a match at the Bay of Cambay, cricket is yet to shed the tag of the empire's game. H

BRIDGEMAN

Shot makers A British Army cricket team in Calcutta, India, 1861. From Rangoon (now Yangon) in 1825 and Buenos Aires (1831) to Shanghai (1858), Britain's military was responsible for seeding the imperial game across the globe

Souvik Naha is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions postdoctoral research fellow at Durham University. His forthcoming book is *Indian Cricket and Postcolonial Society* (CUP)

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

What were conditions like for children kept in the Tower of London?

The child prisoners we know most about are those of high status. Just like adult noblemen and women, they would have been kept in comfortable accommodation, often attended by servants. Some were even allowed visitors – or were visitors themselves. We know that Sir Walter Ralegh, one of the Tower's longest-serving prisoners, had his wife and children to stay in his apartments in the Bloody Tower.

However, if a child or their family fell foul of the monarch, then they might find these luxuries swiftly withdrawn. Edward IV's young sons, Edward V and his brother, Richard (better known as the princes in the Tower), had entered the Tower as honoured guests. But not long after their uncle, Richard of Gloucester, had himself proclaimed King Richard III, they disappeared – presumed murdered. Likewise, after Lady Margaret Pole suffered a horrendously botched execution in 1541, Henry VIII ordered that her young grandson, who had been imprisoned with her, should remain in the Tower under increasingly harsh conditions. The boy was deprived of his tutor and, it seems, of adequate food rations because he died the following year, possibly of starvation.

It is worth noting that not all of the Tower's young residents were there as prisoners. During excavation works close to the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula in 2019, a skeleton of a seven-year-old child was discovered alongside one of a woman aged between 35 and 45. They were most likely buried between 1450 and 1550 but do not appear to have suffered a violent death. Rather, they had likely been part of a community of people who lived and worked at the Tower, enabling it to fulfil its myriad functions as a palace, prison, fortress, menagerie and much more besides.

Tracy Borman, historian, broadcaster and author of *The Story of the Tower of London* (Merrell, 2015)

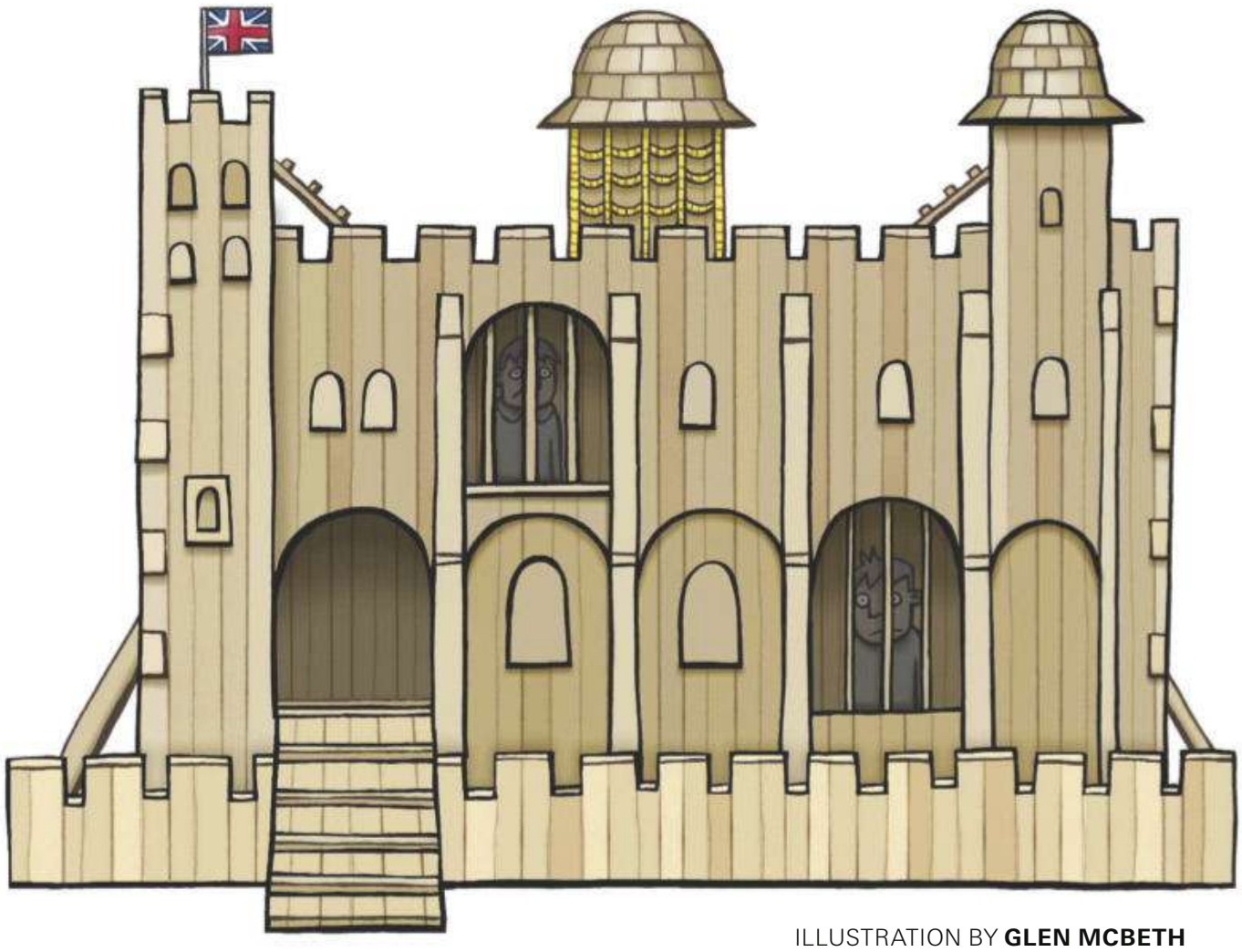
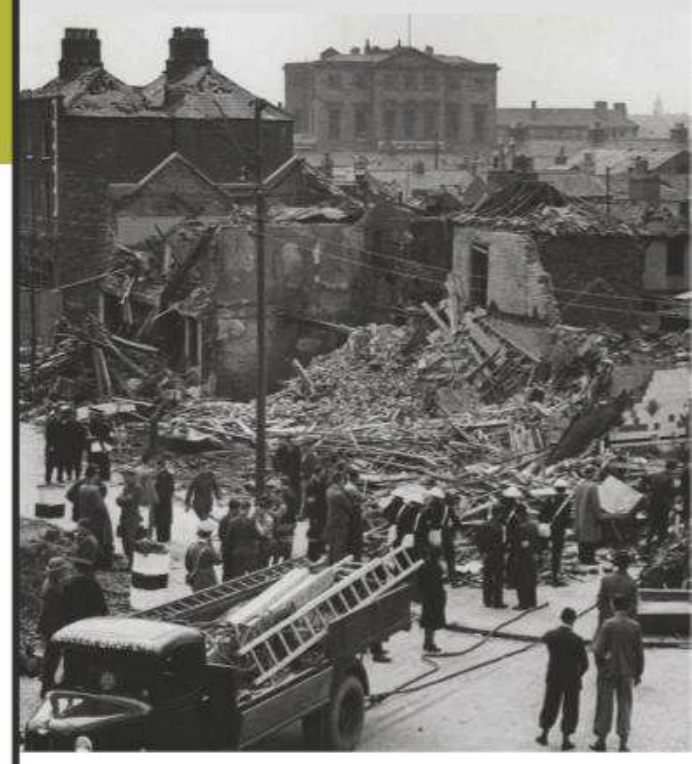


ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN MCBETH**



Dublin's North Strand after a Luftwaffe raid in May 1941. The attack killed at least 28 people

Why did the Nazis bomb Dublin in the Second World War?

David Webb

Éire – as southern Ireland was then called – was strictly neutral during the war. Both German and Allied fliers who came down in Irish territory were interned for the duration, and the use of Irish ports was denied to both sides. However, Dublin and other places in Éire were bombed by the Luftwaffe several times early in the war, killing and injuring civilians and destroying buildings.

The most serious such incident was on 30–31 May 1941, when at least 28 people were killed in Dublin's North Strand area, and the residence of the Irish president, Douglas Hyde, was damaged. The Irish taoiseach (prime minister) Eamon De Valera attended a mass funeral for the victims and made an official protest to Germany.

Most historians believe that the bombings were accidental due to navigational error after the aircraft lost their way while raiding targets in Northern Ireland during the Blitz. There is a theory, though, that the Germans were taking "revenge" after Irish firefighters and rescue services were sent north of the border to Belfast in April 1941, to help after a raid on the city.

After the war the West German government accepted responsibility for the raids, and by 1958 it had paid Dublin £327,000 in compensation.

Nigel Jones, historian specialising in the world wars

SHUTTERSTOCK

The Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II fights an enemy in this temple engraving. He reigned during the height of ancient Egypt's power, at a time when his neighbours in north Africa were mostly nomads

What was happening in what is now Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco when ancient Egypt was at its height?

Phil Roberts

The dynastic age of ancient Egypt lasted for an astonishingly long period of just over 3,000 years, from the unification of the land in 3100 BC to the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 BC. If we take the lengthy reign of Ramesses II (c1279–1213 BC) as the height of ancient Egypt's powers, we can use archaeological and textual evidence to gain a rich understanding of life spread along the Nile at this time.

However, we have far less evidence for life in north Africa to the west of Egypt (modern Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco). Many communities who lived in this vast area were non-literate nomads who travelled great distances with their herds (especially sheep and goats) looking for grazing. They have left few archaeological traces behind.

Along the Mediterranean coast there were more permanent settlements in areas including Cyrenaica in eastern Libya, where seasonal rainfall allowed limited agriculture and the raising of cattle. The ancient Egyptians referred to these desert dwellers as "Tjemeh" and "Tjehenu".

Egypt under Ramesses faced several attempted invasions by coastal-based populations from the west, especially the peoples they referred to as "Libu" and "Meshwesh", which they countered by building a chain of forts in the Western Nile Delta and along the Mediterranean coast. Under Ramesses II's son Merenptah, and during the later reign of Ramesses III, large numbers of different "Libyan" groups managed to invade the delta, but they were defeated by the Egyptian army.

Joyce Tyldesley, professor of Egyptology at the University of Manchester

GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN

A 1939 poster showing the main characters of *The Wizard of Oz*. The film was rated for "Adult Audiences" as it was felt it would scare unaccompanied children

DID YOU KNOW...?

Righteous roller coasters

The roller coaster was invented to save people from sin. LaMarcus Thompson was a businessman from the Midwest who was also a devout Christian. He was troubled by the fact that so many of his contemporaries sought their pleasures in bars and brothels and decided to devise a more wholesome means for them to get their thrills. His first roller coaster, a switchback railway, opened on Coney Island in 1884 and went on to make him a wealthy man.

An unusual demand

The 1919 Treaty of Versailles, after the First World War, had a clause stipulating that Germany had to hand over a human skull to the British government. Sultan Mkwawa was a tribal leader in east Africa who had died in 1898, fighting against German colonialism. His skull had been sent back to Germany. Twenty years later, the British, wishing to reward Mkwawa's people for their help during the war, demanded the skull be returned, and this was included in the treaty's official text.

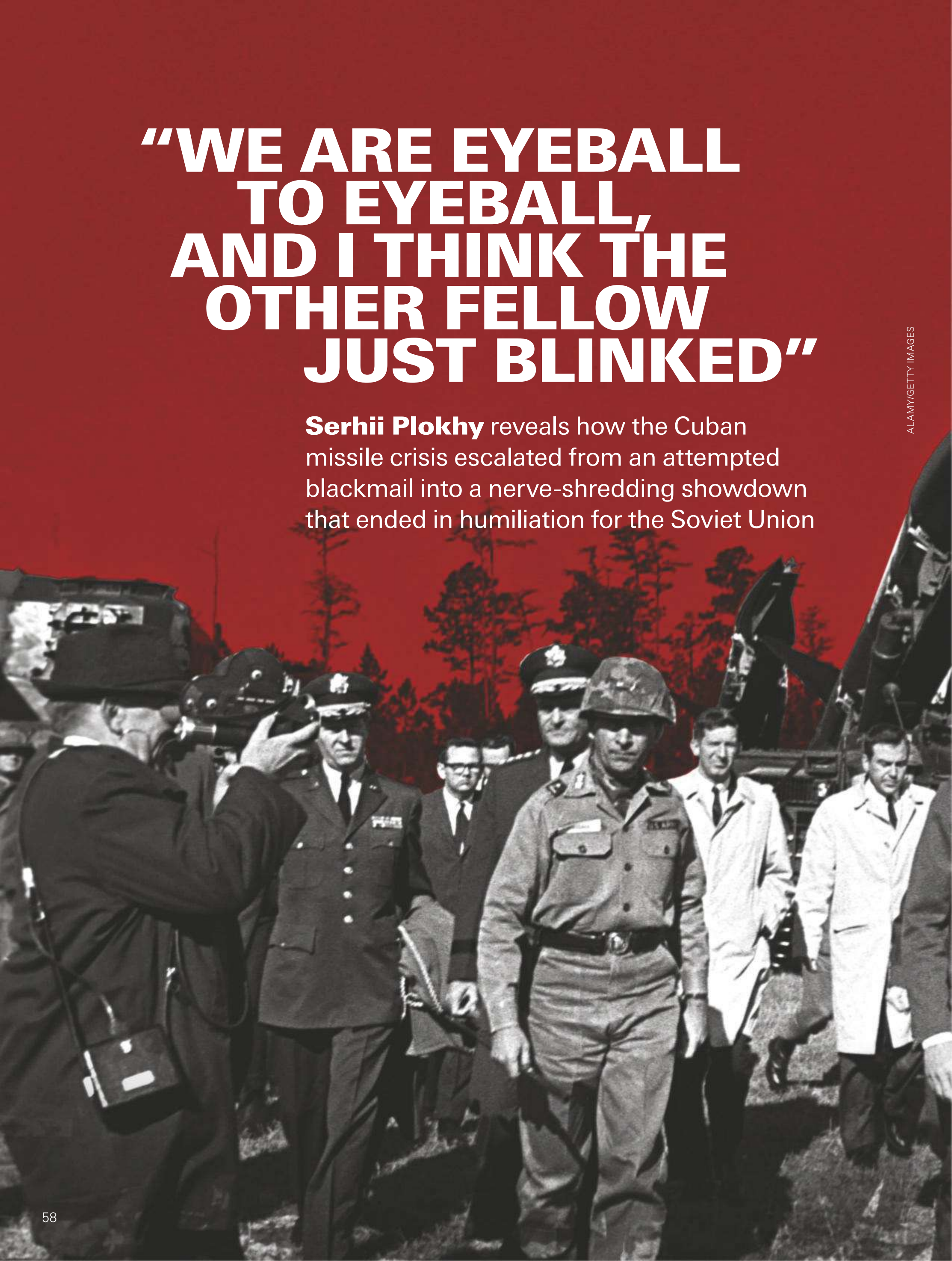
Cowardly lions

The Wizard of Oz was given an "A" for "Adult Audiences" certificate by the British Board of Film Censors when it was released in the UK in 1940. The movie, although based on a famous children's book, was deemed too scary for children to see unless accompanied by an adult. The novelist Graham Greene, then a film critic, was unimpressed. "Surely it is time," he wrote, "that this absurd committee of elderly men and spinsters… was laughed out of existence?" H

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

“WE ARE EYEBALL TO EYEBALL, AND I THINK THE OTHER FELLOW JUST BLINKED”

Serhii Plokhy reveals how the Cuban missile crisis escalated from an attempted blackmail into a nerve-shredding showdown that ended in humiliation for the Soviet Union



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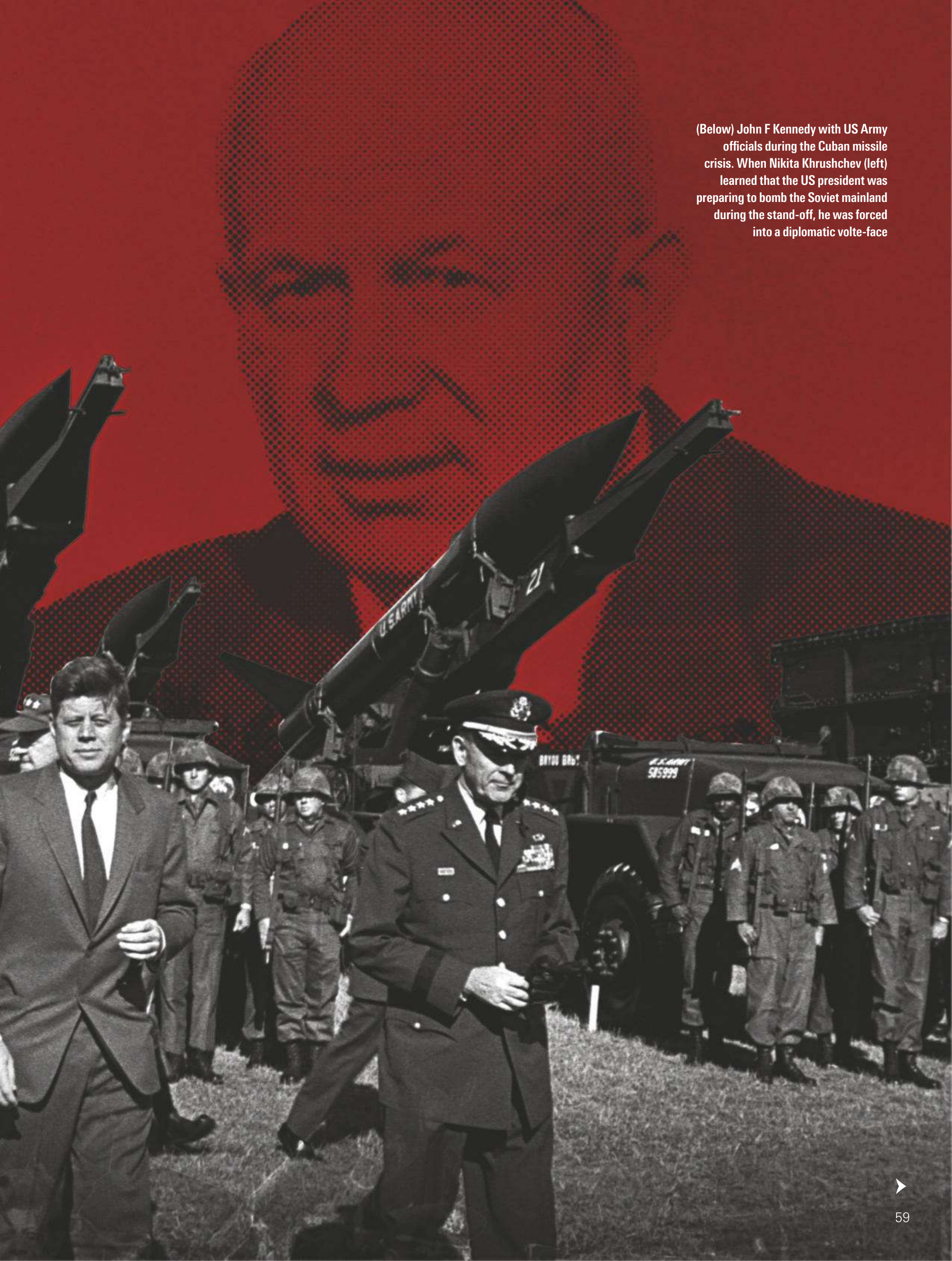
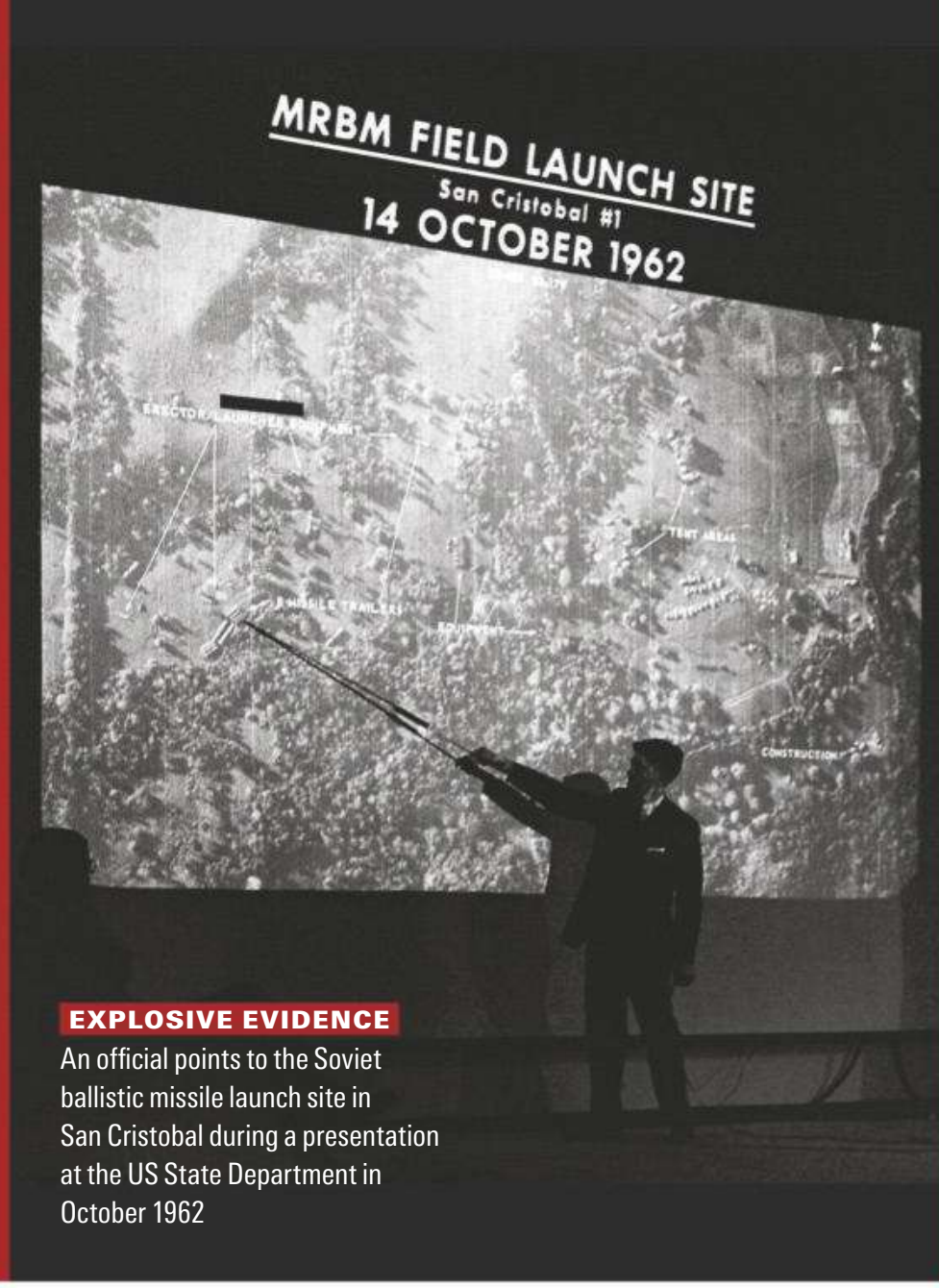


(Below) John F Kennedy with US Army officials during the Cuban missile crisis. When Nikita Khrushchev (left) learned that the US president was preparing to bomb the Soviet mainland during the stand-off, he was forced into a diplomatic volte-face

The Cuban missile crisis

FRIENDS IN NEED
Nikita Khrushchev and Fidel Castro meet in New York, 1960. The Soviet premier cultivated the relationship in order to keep his Cuban counterpart out of the clutches of his great foe, Mao Zedong



EXPLOSIVE EVIDENCE
An official points to the Soviet ballistic missile launch site in San Cristobal during a presentation at the US State Department in October 1962

"You cannot fail to remember that both Hitler and Napoleon used such language in their day when speaking with small countries," dictated an agitated Nikita Khrushchev to his stenographer. "Do you really think even now that the USA is made of one dough, and countries that you threaten of another?"

It was 24 October 1962, one of the tensest days of the Cuban missile crisis, and the Soviet leader was composing a response to his American counterpart, John F Kennedy. Two days earlier Kennedy had gone on TV to announce to his country, and the world, the discovery of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. He demanded their removal and declared a naval blockade of the island, euphemistically calling it a quarantine – in the language of international law, a blockade would have meant war. On 23 October, Kennedy also sent Khrushchev a private letter demanding that he turn back his ships heading for Cuba.

Khrushchev, now in a fighting mood, responded by threatening Kennedy with a nuclear attack. "If any aggressor should attack Cuba, in that case the weapons themselves will start firing in retaliation," read his further dictation. This was already Khrushchev's second letter to Kennedy composed that day. The first one was official, couched in diplomatic terms. This much longer missive of almost seven typed pages was supposed to be confidential, and Khrushchev did not conceal his frustration.

The letter was to be dispatched via Colonel Georgii Bolshakov of the GRU, an acquaintance of the president's brother, Robert. But first the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the country's ruling body, which Khrushchev had packed with his clients and supporters, had to approve it. That would have to wait until the next day, 25 October. But the letter never reached the Kennedys and would remain unknown to scholars until the autumn of 2014, when it was displayed at a Moscow exhibition marking the 120th anniversary of Khrushchev's birth.

On 25 October Khrushchev abruptly reversed course. Not only did he refuse to send his letter, but he agreed to recall his ships loaded with ballistic missiles and to dismantle Soviet missile installations in Cuba. Why the drastic about-face? "The Americans have taken fright – no doubt about that," Khrushchev told the Presidium that day. Many of his closest aides thought differently. Khrushchev had "shat his pants", recalled his deputy foreign minister, Vasilii Kuznetsov.

Within striking distance

The Cuban crisis had begun only 11 days before, on 14 October 1962, when an American high-altitude U-2 plane spotted Soviet ballistic missiles on the island. Khrushchev had put them there the previous month, along with a Soviet garrison of 40,000 troops. The 22-metre-long medium-range missiles, known to the Americans as SS-4 Sandals, had been built in the Ukrainian city of Dnipropetrovsk and brought to Cuba in complete secrecy. With a range of more than 2,000km, they could easily hit Washington, DC.

Khrushchev had two motives for these actions. The first was to assure Fidel Castro, whose aides were flirting with Khrushchev's sworn enemy, the Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong, that he had the Cuban leader's back and would not permit another invasion as had happened at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 (when American-backed Cuban exiles tried and failed to seize control of the island). Secondly, he wanted to compensate for the lack of long-range missiles capable of striking the US from the USSR. The Sputnik rocket aside, Khrushchev had very few of

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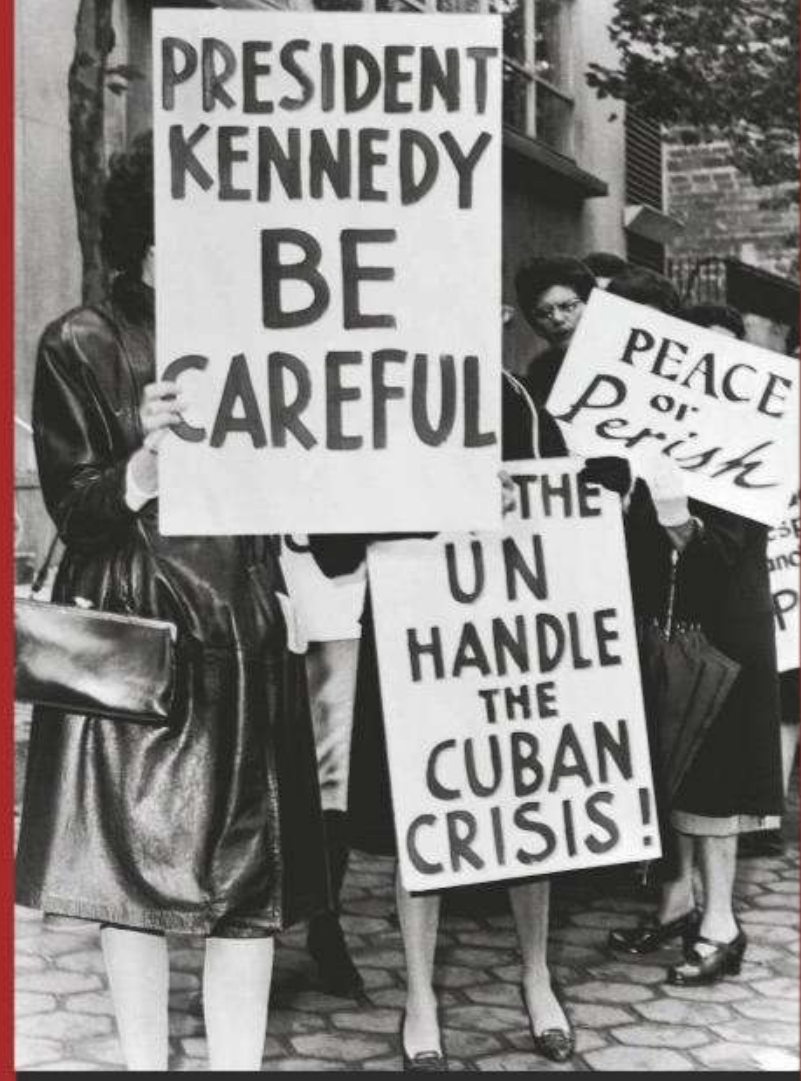
SOMBRE MOOD
JFK addresses the American people, 22 October 1962. The sighting of Soviet missiles in Cuba stunned the president but he pulled back from announcing an imminent attack



GIVE PEACE A CHANCE
With the world perilously close to nuclear war, members of Women Strike for Peace protest near the United Nations building in New York

ALAMY/TOPFOTO

those, and they were highly unreliable.

Kennedy was alerted to the presence of the Soviet missiles on 16 October. He could not believe his ears: Khrushchev, who had publicly declared that he would not put "offensive weapons" on the island and privately assured Kennedy that he would do nothing to undermine him before the Congressional elections of November 1962, had deceived him. It took Kennedy and his advisers on the ExComm – the Executive Committee of the National Security Council – almost a week to come up with a response.

At 7pm on 22 October, a sombre Kennedy, having received intelligence that the Soviet missiles were battle-ready, addressed the nation. In Moscow it was 3am on 23 October. Learning of the forthcoming address, Khrushchev summoned the Presidium members to the Kremlin. "The point is that we do not want to unleash a war. We want to intimidate and restrain the USA vis-à-vis Cuba," Khrushchev told his nervous colleagues as they awaited Kennedy's speech, not knowing what to expect.

Khrushchev then asked what the Presidium should do in case of attack. One possibility was to declare that the USSR had a defence treaty with Cuba, making an American assault on Cuba tantamount to an attack on the Soviet Union. Another was to declare that the missiles were Cuban, and that Havana might respond to an invasion with nuclear weapons. In that case, Washington would have had to negotiate with Havana, not Moscow, and in the worst-case scenario there would have been a nuclear war between the US and Cuba, with the USSR remaining on the sidelines. Khrushchev liked the idea, but one of his close allies, Anastas Mikoyan, disagreed: the Americans would panic and hit the island with all their might, including nuclear weapons. It would be difficult for the USSR to do nothing.

As they were discussing possible responses to an attack, the Soviet defence minister, Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, prepared a telegram to the commander of Soviet troops in Cuba, General Issa Pliev: he was to resist the attack with all means possible. It then dawned on Khrushchev that he was actually giving the commander on the ground permission to attack the American mainland with nuclear weapons.

"If 'all' means without reservations, that means missiles too, that is, the outbreak of thermonuclear war!" exclaimed Khrushchev. They revised the text of the telegram. Now General Pliev was prohibited from using ballistic missiles without orders from Moscow, but the telegram gave him de facto clearance to use tactical nuclear weapons (designed to be used on a battlefield) if attacked. Pliev now had the power to start a local nuclear war. What would stop it from going global was never discussed. They decided to postpone sending the telegram until they heard Kennedy's speech.

To Khrushchev's relief, Kennedy did not announce an imminent attack, opting instead for a naval blockade. In a private message to Khrushchev, Kennedy wrote: "I have not assumed that you or any other sane man would, in this nuclear age, deliberately plunge the world into war which it is crystal clear no country could win and which could only result in catastrophic consequences to the whole world, including the aggressor."

Khrushchev's response combined reassurance with threat. "We confirm that armaments now on Cuba, regardless of classification to which they belong, are destined exclusively for defensive

It dawned on Khrushchev that permission had been given to attack the US mainland with nuclear weapons

purposes, in order to secure Cuban Republic from attack of aggressor," wrote Khrushchev after a sleepless and nerve-wracking night spent in the Kremlin.

That night Khrushchev ordered the captains of ships carrying nuclear warheads and missiles near the Cuban shores to increase their speed and requested those farther away, who would not make it to the island before the imposition of the naval blockade, to turn back. But he refused to turn back ships delivering non-military loads, presenting Kennedy with the dilemma of what to do with those cargo ships as they approached the quarantine line.

The immediate crisis was resolved when news unexpectedly reached the White House that the ships Kennedy had just ordered to be intercepted had turned back much earlier. Relieved, Kennedy aborted the order. "We are eyeball to eyeball, and I think the other fellow just blinked," commented Secretary of State Dean Rusk. They did not know that Khrushchev had blinked long before, on the night of Kennedy's television speech. The lack of timely information almost caused the outbreak of a shooting war. Unknowingly, Kennedy had in fact ordered the interception of ships moving away from the quarantine line, not toward it.

Kennedy braced himself for a possible confrontation on the high seas. Meanwhile, the military dusted off their plans for an invasion of Cuba, and the Strategic Air Command (SAC) raised its Defense Readiness Condition (Defcon) to Level Two – just short of Level One, which meant open warfare. Nuclear-armed B-52s were now in the air, flying to Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. They were prepared to strike targets in the Soviet Union.

Soviet intelligence intercepted the SAC order on 24 October, the day on which Khrushchev dictated his letter comparing Kennedy to Hitler and Napoleon and threatening him that nuclear missiles might start firing on their own if the Americans invaded Cuba.

Nuclear dumping ground

Admittedly, Khrushchev also had a friendlier proposal for the American president. He implied that he would consider removing the missiles as part of a comprehensive agreement leading ultimately to the elimination of all nuclear weapons. "Under such conditions," suggested Khrushchev, "I think that we would not remove all weapons from Cuba but simply drown them in the vicinity if you were to do the same with your weapons." Comprehensive nuclear disarmament was an old demand of Khrushchev's; turning the Caribbean into the world's nuclear dumping ground was a new one.

Khrushchev woke up on 25 October to a barrage of disturbing news. Kennedy had responded tersely to his official letter of the previous day, refusing to be pushed around. "I ask you to recognise clearly, Mr Chairman, that it was not I who issued the first challenge in this case, and that in the light of this record these activities in Cuba required the responses I have announced," read the telegram.

The news about the Strategic Air Command moving to Defcon Two and American nuclear bombers pirouetting over the eastern Mediterranean arrived around the same time. Those steps could be taken as an indication that Kennedy was getting ready to strike not only

The Americans were now ready to deliver all 2,962 of their nuclear warheads to the USSR and its Cuban ally

TIMELINE

The Cuban missile crisis

1 January 1959 **The Cuban Revolution triumphs** with the revolutionary leader Fidel Castro seizing power on the island.

17–20 April 1961 Exiles opposed to Fidel Castro, and backed by the US, launch an **abortive invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs**.

September 1962 Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev **stations medium-range nuclear missiles on Cuba**. Much of mainland America is now in range of a Soviet nuclear attack.

14 October **An American high-altitude U-2 plane** spots the Soviet missiles on Cuba. When informed two days later, US president John F Kennedy is stunned by the news.

22 October **Kennedy addresses the nation** from the White House. He imposes a naval blockade on Cuba but refrains from an all-out attack on the island.

23 October **Khrushchev orders Soviet ships** heading for Cuba – but unable to reach the island before the imposition of the blockade – **to turn back**.

24 October Soviet intelligence intercepts a **US order to raise its Defense Readiness Condition** (DefCon) to Level Two.

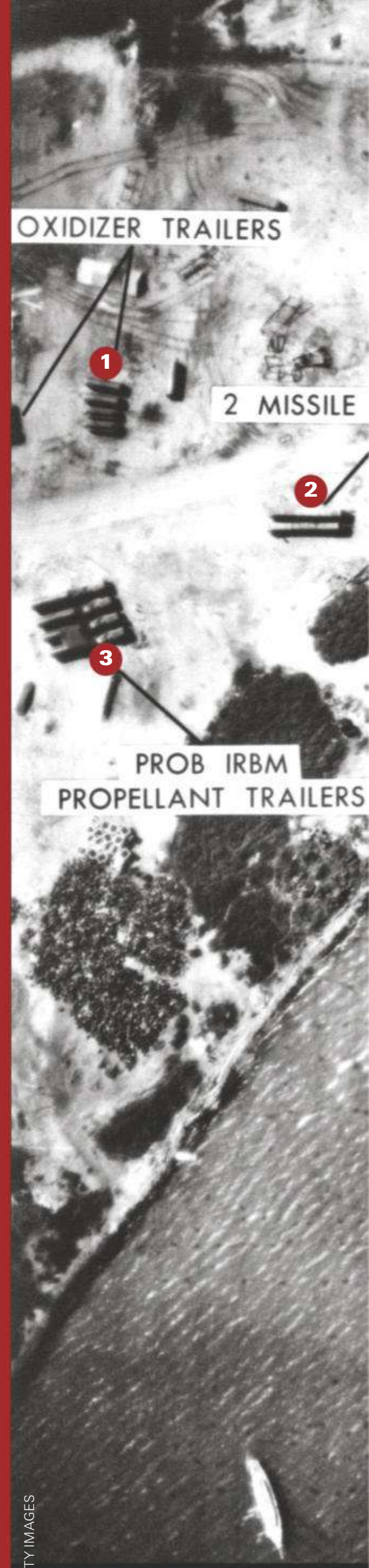
25 October Spooked by these reports – and the news that B-52 bombers are being readied to strike the Soviet mainland – **Khrushchev decides to remove the missiles on Cuba.**

Morning of 27 October Soviet forces **shoot down an American U-2 spy plane** over Cuba.

Evening of 27 October The captain of a Soviet submarine, believing that he is under attack, **orders a strike with a nuclear torpedo against American ships**. Only the intervention of a senior Soviet commander prevents a nuclear strike and ensuing nuclear war.

8 November As part of the deal to bring the crisis to an end, **Khrushchev consents to the Americans checking Soviet vessels leaving Cuba.** This enrages his commanders.

October 1964 **Nikita Khrushchev is removed from power** following a palace coup orchestrated by his successor, Leonid Brezhnev, and backed by the defence minister, Marshal Rodion Malinovsky.



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NUCLEAR CUBA

THE WEAPON SYSTEMS THAT LURKED IN AMERICA'S BACKYARD

TOP: **US Commandant General David M Shoup looks through binoculars into Cuba, November 1962**
MIDDLE: **An SS-4 Sandal in Moscow, 1960. Two years later, these missiles would be targeted on America from its own backyard**
BOTTOM: **A US intelligence image of a nuclear warhead bunker under construction in San Cristobal during the Cuban missile crisis**

This image, taken on 5 November 1962, reveals some of the Soviet missile equipment spirited into Cuba on the orders of Nikita Khrushchev. The photo shows:

1 4 **The Soviet ballistic missiles used kerosene as a fuel. This could only burn with the help of an oxidiser – in this case, nitric acid, transported in the trucks shown in the image.**

2 5 7 **The Soviets shipped four regiments of R-12 Dvina missiles to Cuba in the autumn of 1962. These medium-range weapons (known to the Americans as SS-4 Sandals) had been built in the Ukrainian city of Dnipropetrovsk. They were moved around on the transporters shown here.**

3 **Pictured here are tankers carrying fuel for R-14 Chusovaya intermediate-range ballistic missiles. Due to the American blockade of Cuba, these missiles never made it to the island – but, as the image proves, part of their support equipment did.**

6 **Shown aboard the ship, above, is a portal crane used for erecting the R-12 missiles in preparation for their launch. With a range of more than 2,000km, the missiles could now reach many of America's major cities.**

UP AND RUNNING
A Strategic Air Command (SAC) combat crew races for its B-52 in the 1960s. During the Cuban crisis, SAC was poised to drop nuclear bombs on the Soviet Union

FLASHPOINT
The debris of a US U-2 spy plane shot down over Cuba, killing the pilot. A diplomatic crisis had now become a shooting war

BATTLE STATIONS
Cuban militiamen man a gun on Havana's shoreline. By late October 1962, the Soviets and Cubans believed that a US attack was imminent

Cuba but the Soviet Union itself. A total of 1,306 bombers and 182 ballistic missiles were ready to deliver all 2,962 nuclear warheads in America's possession to the USSR and its Cuban ally.

That was the moment when, according to Vasilii Kuznetsov, Khrushchev "shat his pants". His draft letter of the previous day was discarded. "Do not get into a petty exchange of insults with the same arguments," read the protocol of the Presidium meeting. "Compose a letter to Kennedy as dictated." A Central Committee official wrote on a copy of the old letter that it should not be sent because of the Presidium's decision to send a different letter.

"Mr President," wrote Khrushchev, "we and you ought not now to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knot of war, because the more the two of us pull, the tighter that knot will be tied. And a moment may come when that knot will be tied so tight that even he who tied it will not have the strength to untie it, and then it will be necessary to cut that knot, and what that would mean is not for me to explain to you, because you yourself understand perfectly of what terrible forces our countries dispose."

On 27 October, the captain of a Soviet submarine ordered a strike with a nuclear torpedo against American ships

To the members of the Presidium, Khrushchev said: "It's not capitulation on our part, because if we shoot, they'll shoot back." He then proposed a new plan of action. "Kennedy says to us: take your missiles out of Cuba. We answer: give firm guarantees and promises that the Americans will not attack Cuba. That's not bad." Khrushchev's aides, fearing that his adventurism would trigger nuclear war, unanimously supported his proposal. They wanted the nightmare to end.

According to the protocol of the meeting, the Presidium decided to "dismantle the missile installations".

Kennedy's refusal to back down wrong-footed Khrushchev. The US leader had scuttled the Bay of Pigs invasion a year earlier, and his Soviet counterpart expected him to do the same now. When he didn't, a frightened Khrushchev felt that he had no choice but to blink; within three days of the presidential address, the Soviet leader had decided to remove the missiles from Cuba.

This, though, didn't mean the danger and drama were over. If anything, they intensified. Khrushchev would not have been himself if he had not tried to bargain.

Khrushchev asked Kennedy to remove the US missiles in Turkey as a precondition of removing his missiles from Cuba. Kennedy was prepared to take the deal – he had contemplated such an exchange from the start of the crisis. But he could not do so openly or immediately without offending the Turks and sending a signal to Nato that one day he might remove the American nuclear umbrella without so much as a prior consultation. Tensions mounted. Ironically, things began to spin out of control just as the two leaders had all but agreed on a deal.

On the morning of 27 October, exhausted after a sleepless night, General Issa Pliev, the Soviet military commander in Cuba, took a nap. Just then, his subordinates fired a surface-to-air missile at an American U-2 airplane surveying the island, shooting it down. They had been expecting a US air attack at any minute, and Castro had already ordered his air defences to shoot at low-flying US airplanes. The two Soviet generals who gave the order without consulting Pliev or Moscow believed that, with the U-2 registering the locations of their missiles, a US assault was imminent. The officers who executed the shot braced themselves for immediate retaliation.

With the U-2 down, the Cuban crisis had degenerated

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HUMILIATING CLIMBDOWN
IL-28 bombers aboard a Soviet vessel off Cuba, December 1962. Many Soviet commanders were furious at Khrushchev for allowing the Americans to inspect their ships as they returned home

THE PLOTTERS
Shaken by Khrushchev's nuclear brinkmanship, defence minister Rodion Malinovsky (centre) backed the coup led by the future leader Leonid Brezhnev (right) that removed Khrushchev from power

into a shooting war. It almost turned into a nuclear one when, during the evening of 27 October, the captain of a Soviet submarine in the Sargasso Sea ordered a strike with a nuclear torpedo against American ships. Only the interference of a senior officer on the submarine stopped the launch. In Moscow, Khrushchev woke up to the news about the downing of the U-2. Terrified of what might come next, he was prepared to withdraw his demand about the Turkish missiles.

At that moment, news arrived that the no less desperate Kennedy was offering a secret swap of the American missiles in Turkey for the Soviet ones in Cuba. Khrushchev jumped at the offer. He transmitted his agreement on Radio Moscow to prevent any new accidents – a note sent through diplomatic channels might take up to 24 hours to reach the White House. "We instructed our officers – these weapons, as I had already informed you earlier, are in the hands of Soviet officers – to take appropriate measures to discontinue construction of the aforementioned facilities, to dismantle them, and to return them to the Soviet Union," read the key sentence of Khrushchev's typically lengthy response.

Castro's indignation

Khrushchev's pledge to remove the missiles was met with jubilation in Washington and, as Fidel Castro would later state, with "indignation" in Havana. Castro, whose revolution was anti-imperial first and communist second, felt betrayed – his fate and that of his country had been decided by the superpowers without consulting him.

The Cubans refused to allow inspection of their missile sites – a condition of the Khrushchev-Kennedy deal. So the Soviets had to show the Americans the missiles loaded on their ships, and these US inspections of vessels heading back to the USSR humiliated the Soviet military, turning its commanders against Khrushchev.

In October 1964 Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, the Soviet defence minister, backed the palace coup that removed Khrushchev from power. It was led by Khrushchev's other protégé, Leonid Brezhnev. Like others in the Soviet leadership, Brezhnev was frightened of Khrushchev's unpredictability and nuclear brinkmanship. "I will never forget," he recalled, "how Nikita [Khrushchev], in a panic, would send a telegram to Kennedy, then 'en route' order it to be stopped and recalled. And why? Because he wanted to screw over the Americans. I remember he was shouting at the CC Presidium: 'We can hit a fly in Washington with our missiles!'… And what happened? A shame! We nearly plunged into nuclear war."

Khrushchev's nuclear gamble backfired. His attempt to blackmail Kennedy with the threat of nuclear war failed, and he became so frightened that he was prepared to remove the missiles for nothing but a promise from Kennedy not to invade Cuba. Khrushchev had confidently expected the missiles to prevent American aggression not only against Cuba but also against the Soviet Union. But once the missiles were discovered, he abandoned his scheme.

"Of course, I was scared. It would have been insane not to be scared. I was frightened about what could happen to my country and all the countries that would be devastated by a nuclear war," Khrushchev told the visiting American journalist Norman Cousins later that year. "If being frightened meant that I helped avert such insanity, then I'm glad I was frightened. One of the problems in the world today is that not enough people are sufficiently frightened by the danger of nuclear war." H

Serhii Plokhy is professor of history at Harvard University, and author of *Nuclear Folly: A New History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Allen Lane, 2021). He recently discussed the crisis on our podcast: *historyextra.com/podcast*

LISTEN Tune in to a **Witness History** episode on the crisis. *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p00bgtq2*

BBC WORLD SERVICE

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Non-conformer
William Hogarth's *The Painter and His Pug* (1745) shows him resting on three books including *Paradise Lost* by the Puritan intellectual John Milton. Hogarth had an ambivalent – but far from hostile – relationship with the Church of England

GETTY IMAGES

Faith, gin and charity

Behind William Hogarth's biting satirical snapshots of 18th-century society was an artist in tune with the teachings of the Bible. By examining five of Hogarth's greatest paintings and engravings, **Jacqueline Riding** reveals how religion and faith shaped his life and art

For a truly unvarnished view of early 18th-century England – its hypocrisies, vices and vast inequalities – look no further than the graphic satires of William Hogarth: from the temptation, decline and fall of a wealthy merchant's son in *A Rake's Progress* (1735), through to the human degradation of *Gin Lane* (1751).

Hogarth is famed as a contrarian and iconoclast – traits (you might think) that would naturally put him at odds with organised religion. Certainly his attitude to the Church of England was ambivalent – a relationship summed up by the occasion when he is said to have urinated in a church porch. Yet, when it comes to Hogarth and religion, all is not what it seems.

Hogarth was born in 1697 in Bartholomew Close, West Smithfield, a short distance from the ancient church of St Bartholomew the Great. Here the infant William was baptised – the very font, dating from 1405, is still in situ. Yet his arrival would be recorded in the nonconformist register, indicating that Hogarth's father, Richard, came from a Protestant dissenting tradition.

A scholar, teacher and author, Richard's profound influence on his son is revealed through his publications, which teem with ethical statements and strident attitudes that chime perfectly with William's "modern moral subjects", as the artist himself defined them. In his *Introduction to English, Latin and Greek* (1689), Richard counselled "young people", at whom the book is aimed, to "use not your self to women or wine". Unfortunately, Tom Rakewell ignores this advice with disastrous consequences in the eight engravings that make up *A Rake's Progress*. And further on Richard observes: "So prevalent is custom, That if you set your self resolutely to that which is good, or that which is evil, you shall not easily relinquish the one or the other", the basis of the dramatically diverging journeys of the two apprentices in his son's *Industry and Idleness* (1747).

Social decay

The exhortation to "Love Thy Neighbour" may not sit easily with the social decay of *Gin Lane*. But throughout his life Hogarth demonstrated a charitable and moral bent that aligns with the teachings of the Bible. This is epitomised by his close association with St Bartholomew's and Foundling Hospitals. Both examples combined pragmatism – the desire to give practical aid to those in need – with an appreciation for Jesus's teachings and example as set out in the New Testament.

Even Hogarth's more robust moral narratives have a self-conscious parabolic quality, and his close friendships with clergymen suggest he was far from hostile to the Anglican church. The Reverend John Hoadly, for example, supplied the accompanying verses for *A Rake's Progress*.

Hogarth's use of the term "progress" immediately conjures up John Bunyan's nonconformist epic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. And the Puritan John Milton, through his *Paradise Lost*, joins Jonathan Swift and William Shakespeare as the literary and spiritual foundations on which Hogarth quite literally rests in his celebrated *Self-Portrait with Pug* of 1745 (see the three books at the bottom of the image, left).

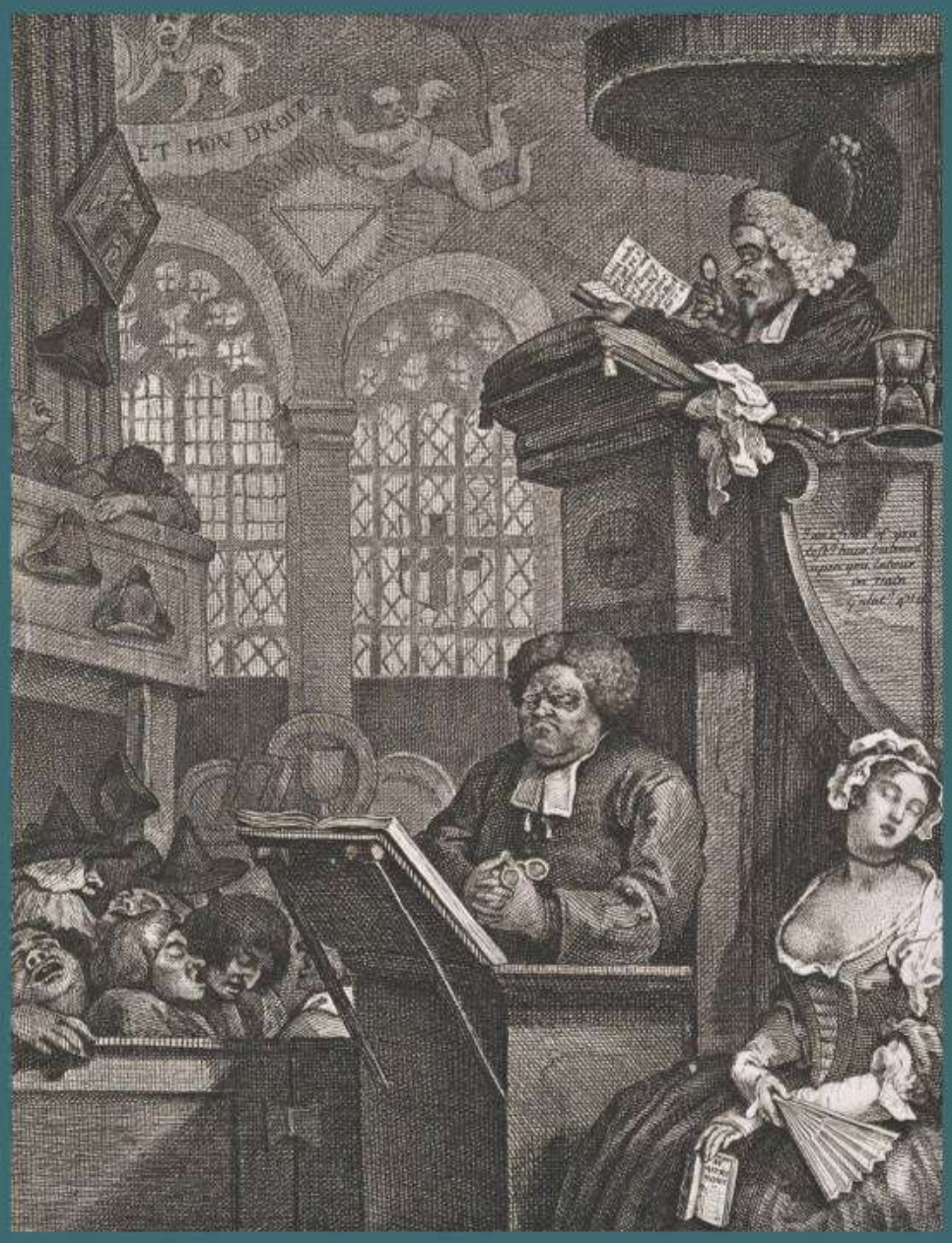
So, far from being an enemy of the church and organised religion, Hogarth's view was instead more nuanced. As the works of art over the page reveal, at the heart of Hogarth's morality lies a religious core that we cannot ignore.

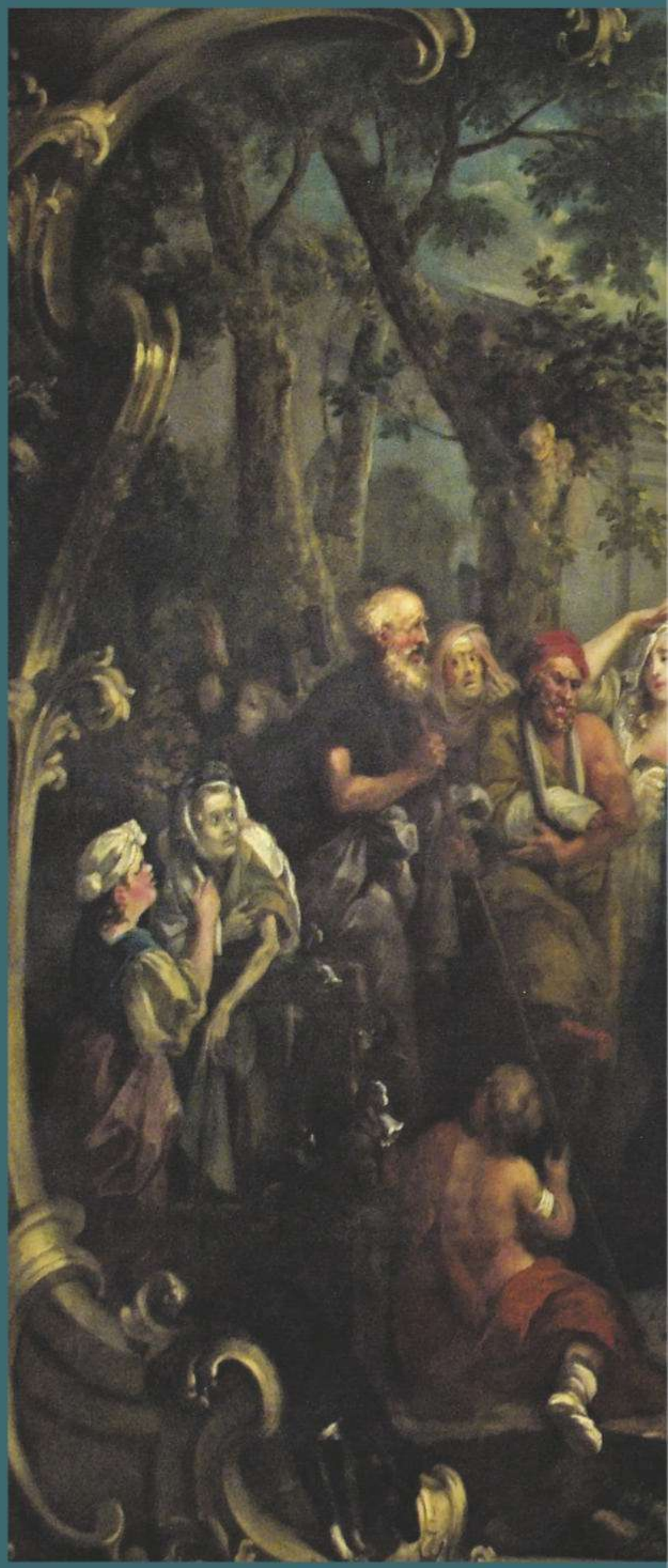
Sweet dreams

The Sleeping Congregation, 1736

Hogarth's antagonism for organised religion has undoubtedly been overplayed. But there's no denying that he was prepared to take the occasional swipe at the Church of England. *The Sleeping Congregation* (republished in 1762 as the print shown below) satirises the sheer tedium of a service delivered in an ancient rural church where a preacher preaches on, regardless of whether his flock are listening. His sermon has sent the entire congregation into slumber, lending ironic meaning to Christ's words of hope for the body and soul, visible on the right-hand page of the cleric's book: "Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden & I will give you rest."

Below the preacher, a grumpy curate glances sideways at a pretty young woman. With her prayer book open at the section "Of matrimony", it would appear that her dreams are of romantic rather than spiritual love.





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Healing hands

The Pool of Bethesda, 1736

Born and raised near St Bartholomew's Hospital, Hogarth was determined to win the commission to paint the magnificent staircase in James Gibbs's new administration wing: so determined, in fact, that he offered to make them a donation and provide his time free of charge, becoming a governor (or trustee) in the process.

The two monumental scenes, covering the north and east walls, depict *The Good Samaritan*, Christ's parable of fellow-feeling, kindness and practical help, and *The Pool of Bethesda* (shown above), the scene of a miracle where the lame man rises to his feet and walks.

The central figures in this vast painting are surrounded by individuals with recognisable medical conditions. To the immediate right of Christ's extended hand, a mother with her sick baby (who is suffering from rickets) is being blocked by a guard. This detail may offer an indication of where Hogarth's charitable instincts will next be focussed...

Saving the children

The Foundlings, c1739

In 1739 Hogarth became a founding governor of a refuge for newborns at risk of abandonment or murder, known as the Foundling Hospital. Hogarth produced *The Foundlings* for the headpiece of the subscription roll, a fundraising document for the new institution. (The image below is Hogarth's preparatory drawing called *A Study for the Foundlings*). At the centre is the hospital's founder, Captain Thomas Coram, who looks towards a kneeling woman, a dagger lying on the ground in front of her, implying that she has been foiled in an attempt to murder her child. The infant is held by the beadle, the officer in charge of security.

The design presents two realities: on one side is despair, featuring scenes of peril and abandonment. On the other is hope, characterised by the rescued children in their neat uniforms (by tradition, designed by Hogarth) holding items representing their training and future professions.

The distant parish church, on whose charity the poor are traditionally expected to rely, is balanced by (and perhaps found wanting in comparison to) the more prominent hospital building in the foreground. The hospital's window bars form a cross – a sign of where true Christian charity can be found.

YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ARTS/GETTY IMAGES

A parable of virtue and vice

Two scenes from **Industry and Idleness,** 1747

Churches play a prominent role in a number of Hogarth's most famous artworks. There's St Giles-in-the-Fields in *Gin Lane* and St Martin-in-the-Fields in 1751's *Beer Street* (neighbouring parishes yet, in all other respects, worlds apart). And there's the unidentified City of London church that forms the backdrop to two scenes in *Industry and Idleness*, a series of 12 engravings that Hogarth produced in 1747.

The series is centred around the contrasting fortunes of two London apprentices, Francis Goodchild and Tom Idle. The first engraving shows Francis and Tom together at their weaving looms. But by the next paired scenes (above and above left), Hogarth establishes that the two are already on very different trajectories. Through these examples of industry and virtue in opposition to idleness and vice, Hogarth is, as he put it: "Shewing the advantages attending the former, and the miserable effects of the latter."

In one scene Francis joins a divine service, sharing his hymn book with his master's daughter (and his own future wife). Meanwhile, outside, Tom gambles with his life and soul which, as the skull-and-bone omens littering the ground make clear, will take him all the way to the gallows.

No such fate awaits Francis who continues his steady progress towards the lord mayoralty of London – his reward for being a dutiful Christian. H

Jacqueline Riding is an art historian, historian and author. Her new book, *Hogarth: Life in Progress*, will be published in July by Profile Books

LISTEN Tune in to an episode of **Great Lives** on William Hogarth: *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00dnwsm*

The

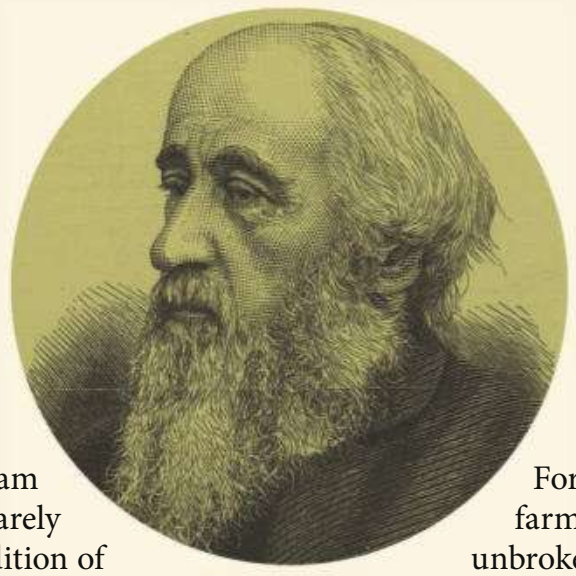
language

that

would save

England

Dispossession and grinding poverty blighted 19th-century rural England. The solution, according to one eccentric clergyman, lay in a form of English taken back to its Anglo-Saxon roots. **Siân Rees** investigates



The Reverend William Barnes falls squarely into an English tradition of rural clerics with long white beards, eclectic intellectual passions, a powerful social conscience and a slightly mad look in their eye. Born to a family of agricultural labourers in rural Dorset in 1801, over the course of a long and active life Barnes (shown above) was a schoolmaster, parson, husband and father, inventor, illustrator, solicitor's clerk, contributor to a Royal Commission, and antiquary.

Barring the trips to study divinity in Cambridge, Barnes lived in Dorset and Wiltshire until his death in 1886. He witnessed enormous changes – none of them, in his eyes, good – in the lives of the working people around him. The agricultural "improvements" that had begun in the 1700s caused particular hardship during the long economic depression of the early 19th century. Experiments with crops, animals and equipment and the development of large-scale mono-crop and dairy farming all led to rising yields and profits for farm owners, but not for the labourers who worked their land. Over a few generations, a self-sufficient yeomanry became a landless peasantry, reduced to selling its labour by the day or hour or season, turning to welfare or emigration to replace their lost security.

Although Barnes' vision of previous generations of happy landfolk sustaining themselves from an honest day's toil was a romantic one, the 19th century certainly inflicted brutal changes on rural life. Where historians and contemporary commentators found explanations in new technologies, a rising population and the availability of capital, Barnes saw a longer pattern of exploitation. For him, the recent dispossession of farming folk was the latest chapter in an unbroken eight-centuries-long story. The rapacious brutality of Norman feudalism was still alive and in operation, given a new lease of life by a rampant capitalism which had destroyed any remaining sense of social solidarity.

Under the "atheldom" of Anglo-Saxon England, which had been eliminated by the Norman warrior caste, all classes had lived in harmony – in Barnes' belief – bound by common interests and values. The elite of 19th-century England might no longer be Norman, but its values remained those of the Conqueror: command-and-obey enforced by brutal punishment; the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate – kept there by violence, fear and the rigorous collection of taxes.

Many solutions were proposed to alleviate the rural distress of the early and mid-19th century: the poor law, assisted emigration, organised labour, machine-breaking. The salve suggested by Barnes was to purge the English language, as a means to revive the lost Anglo-Saxon commonwealth. If everyone in England spoke real English, he thought, as opposed to what he termed "Englandish" – the language disfigured by Latinate imports – a common sensibility would emerge among classes

Barnes thought the rapacious brutality of Norman feudalism was still alive and in operation

BRIDGEMAN

who currently found each other incomprehensible.

Why should the language of power be Normanised when fine English words lay dormant, waiting to reclaim their rightful place in English discourse? How could the English behave with Anglo-Saxon solidarity when they were taught to think in the arrogant patterns of the Normans? Barnes was determined to offer a solution.

Barnes was ideally placed for the task of excavating pure Anglo-Saxon from what he regarded as the corrupted mish-mash of borrowings his compatriots spoke. He was a phenomenal linguist: he had a working knowledge of 70 languages and fluency in 14. However, he was most fascinated by the dialect of Dorset, which he was convinced was the closest approximation to the Anglo-Saxon spoken in pre-Conquest England.

This dialect formed the bones of his new language. He began working on it in the 1830s, listening to the speech of those around him in Dorset and studying texts written in Frisian and Old English, before producing reams of poetry written in this Dorset dialect. Over the next three decades he continued to refine the language, ultimately producing reference books that laid out hundreds of words belonging to this new "national English" he had concocted.

In the 1840s, Barnes published two volumes of poetry written entirely in Dorset dialect, the bedrock of Barnes' "national tongue". They had a modest reception generally but a huge effect on another Dorset writer, Thomas Hardy, whose notions of "Wessex", its landscapes and its folk were heavily influenced by his older neighbour. Barnes lovingly described the county in his second collection of *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect*:

"The Primrwose in the sheade do blow
The cowslip in the zun
The thyme upon the down do grow
The clote where streams do run
An' where do pretty maidens grow
An' blow, but where the tow'r
Do rise among the bricken tuns
In Blackmwore by the Stour."

So far, so sweetly rustic. Yet Barnes had also used this language for political commentary, voicing the anger of agricultural workers stripped of rights, security, land and agency in a series of "eclogues" (dialect conversations) published in the 1830s, a decade of extreme unrest. In 1830, Kent labourers, enraged by rapid enclosure and the introduction of threshing machines to replace human labour, embarked on a wave of destruction that became known as the Swing Riots and swept eastern and southern England. Four years later, the Tolpuddle martyrs – six labourers from a town not 20 miles from Barnes' own home – were transported to Australia for organising wage protests. Barnes wrote of these events:

"In these here pleace there use to be/
Eight farms avore they were a'draw'd together
En' eight farm-housn/Now how many be there?

Fanning the flames A c1900 image of a mob setting fire to a haystack in Kent during the Swing Riots. Barnes penned poems in Dorset dialect, the basis of his new form of English, about the unrest

Class divide A 13th-century picture showing members of the three medieval estates: a cleric, a knight and a peasant. Barnes felt Norman feudalism thrived in his time, reinvigorated by capitalism

Barnes was a phenomenal linguist: he had a working knowledge of 70 languages and was fluent in 14

Why after this, you know/ there'll be but dreee.
Thomas Thomas's employer is to be turn'd out of his farm by the landlord
An' now they don't imploy so many men/
Upon the land as work'd upon it then
Vor all they midden crop it worse, nor stock it/
The lan'lord to be sure, is in pocket."

Towards the end of his life, Barnes drew on his linguistic knowledge to produce magisterial works setting out an almost Tolkien-esque corpus of philology (word-craft). They are not the easiest read: both *Early England and the Saxon-English* and *An Outline of English Speech-craft* (grammar) contain sections of almost complete impenetrability, as Barnes leads us through *breath-pennings* (words) and *speech-strains* (emphases), *thing mark-words* (nouns), *unoutreaching* (intransitive) verbs and the *hinge-mood* (subjunctive).

But the *word-hoard* (a term he included in his 1869 publication *Early England and the Saxon-English*, meaning "glossary") of terms he devised to replace the *lore-words* (scientific terms) which drew on Greek or Latin rather than Old English is a thing of delight. How can any doctor continue to diagnose sciatica when *hip-wark* is available? Why do we speak of probability when we could be discussing *mightsomeness*? And if Americans were wise to retain fall instead of autumn, they could have gone further: *steadsmen* could have *upthronged* in the *loremote* (representatives met in congress).

However, Barnes was out of step with his times. He was rather shunned by the local establishment, and although he had his admirers, his ideas were not taken up – perhaps understandably – in pedagogical or linguistic circles. The governors of the local grammar school never offered him the headmastership he wanted, and Furnivall, compiler of the Oxford English Dictionary, refused his offer of collaboration.

But Barnes persevered. In 1884, two years before his death, he suggested – perhaps tongue in cheek – an alternative version of the queen's speech to be delivered by the lord chancellor in that year's trip to the House of Lords. Rather than "I continue to view with unabated satisfaction the mitigation and diminution of agrarian crime in Ireland, and the substantial improvement in the condition of its people", Barnes suggested: "I do still zee to my unlessened happiness how vield crimes be a milden-d and a lessen-d in Ireland, and in what a soundly bettered plight be the vo'k."

He was not taken up on his suggestion. H

Siân Rees is an author and historian. Her books include *Moll: The Life and Times of Moll Flanders* (Chatto & Windus, 2011)

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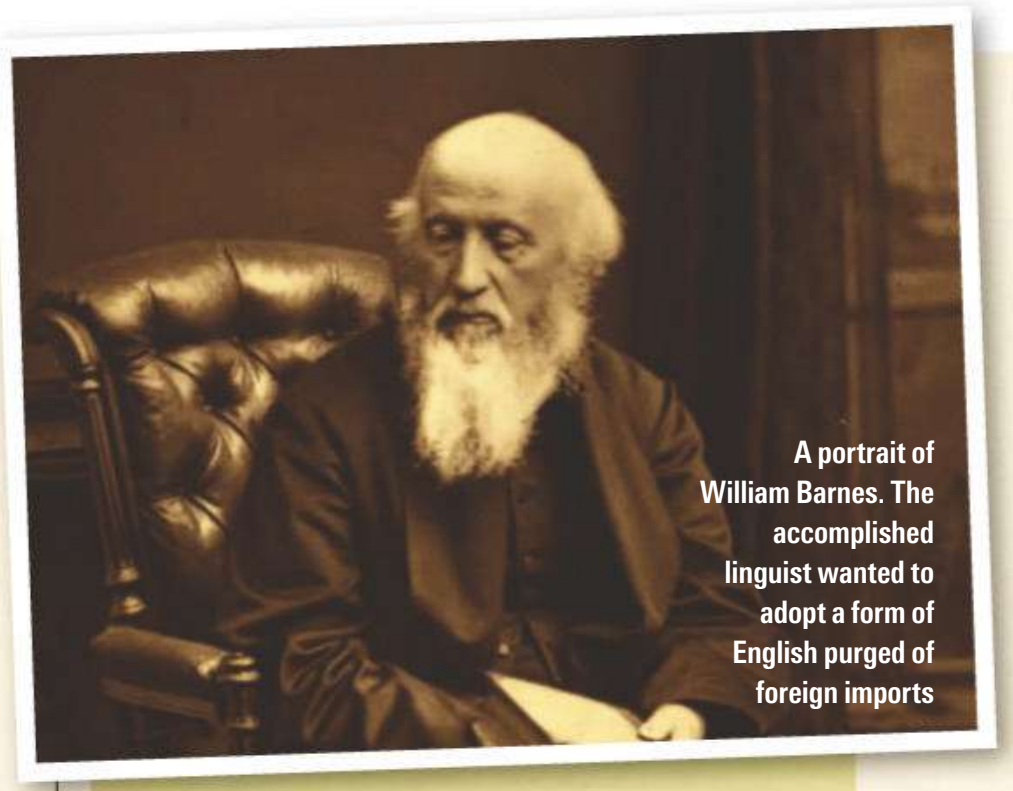

A portrait of William Barnes. The accomplished linguist wanted to adopt a form of English purged of foreign imports

In plain language

Below are five of the most colourful words Barnes invented, and their English counterparts

Mind-glee : *delight*

"Glee" is the Middle English word for the Latinate "pleasure" and "music". Thus, "mind-glee" means pleasure/music of the mind.

Skysill : *horizon*

"Sill", as in window sill, means threshold. So Barnes' "skysill" translates to threshold of the sky.

Incarveling : *insect*

Barnes explains this translation with "insects have two deep incarvings, sundering head, throat and belly".

Leechcraft : *medicine*

This is one of many "crafts" in national English (others include *gleecraft*, meaning the practice of music). Here, "Leech" does not refer to the creatures' traditional use in medicine (as shown right), but instead comes from the Old Saxon word *laki*, meaning physician.

Licherest : *cemetery*

"Lich" is the Middle English word for corpse. This is where "lych gate" – the gate at the bottom of the cemetery through which a funeral procession passes – comes from.

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Tracy Borman is a bestselling author and historian, specialising in the Tudor period. Her books include *Elizabeth's Women*, which was Book of the Week on BBC Radio 4; *Thomas Cromwell: The Untold Story of Henry VIII's Most Faithful Servant*, which was a *Sunday Times* bestseller; *The Private Lives of the Tudors*; and, most recently, *Henry VIII and the Men Who Made Him*. Tracy has presented a number of history programmes for Channel 5, Yesterday and the Smithsonian Channel. She works part-time as joint Chief Curator of Historic Royal Palaces and as chief executive of the Heritage Education Trust.

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Peter Mandler gives his verdict on Adrian Wooldridge's *Aristocracy of Talent* › page 82

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"It is often said that assassination changes nothing, but that is clearly untrue"

Nigel Jones reviews *Day of the Assassins* by Michael Burleigh › page 86

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Tracy Borman on Franny Moyle's biography of Hans Holbein › page 85

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INTERVIEW / ALICE ROBERTS

"Graves are like time capsules – little microcosms of prehistoric culture"

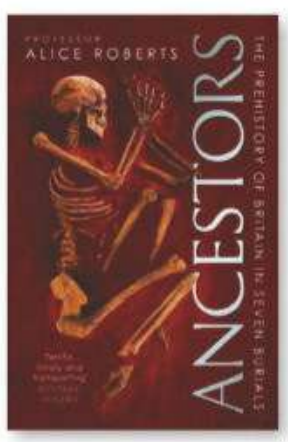
ALICE ROBERTS speaks to Ellie Cawthorne about her new book, *Ancestors*, which explores the story of prehistoric Britain through seven burials – and reveals what cutting-edge science can tell us about the ancient past

Ellie Cawthorne: What kind of things might you find in a prehistoric grave, and what could they reveal about the past?
Alice Roberts: Prehistory is intensely interesting to me because the only way that we can approach it is through archaeology. You are left to piece together the story through traces left in the ground – the material objects of ancient cultures, remnants of constructions and buildings, and the remains of our own ancestors.

There's an often forensic process that goes on when you're trying to reconstruct what life was like in the prehistoric era, and burial sites represent a treasure trove of information. Graves such as that of the [early Bronze Age] Amesbury Archer or the "Red Lady of Paviland" [actually a young man who died 33-34,000 years ago] are absolutely stuffed with cultural artefacts. They essentially act as time capsules – little microcosms of the culture of the time.

As well as the objects we find in graves, we're able to extract ever more information from the bones themselves. For me, as a biological anthropologist, it's been astonishing how the science around this has developed over the past 20 to 30 years.

What kind of information can we glean from bones?
If I'm presented with a skeleton, I can tell quite a lot just by looking at the bones with the naked eye. I have a background as a medical doctor and before I started learning the business of osteoarchaeology, I would have thought: "It's just a skeleton. How much can you really tell? You can't ask it about symptoms, you can't do blood tests." But I was astonished at how much you could work out. First, bone responds to disease. Some infections, such as syphilis and tuberculosis, affect bone in very distinctive ways. Osteoarthritis is also easy to identify from tiny holes on the surface of a joint.



Ancestors: A Prehistory of Britain in Seven Burials
by Alice Roberts
(Simon & Schuster, 448 pages, £20)

Next you can look at teeth. People suffered from dental disease in the past, just as we do today, but most prehistoric people actually had much better teeth than ours because they didn't have such a starchy, sugary diet. They didn't brush their teeth as fastidiously as we do, but their teeth are nevertheless usually in surprisingly good condition.

Employing radiography techniques, such as using X-rays, allows us to uncover more clues – hidden features of the bones. And with a micro CT [computed tomography] scanner we're able to slice up the bones virtually, allowing us to analyse them without incurring any damage.

Then there are chemical techniques that allow us to analyse the ratios of different elements in bones and teeth. Our bodies are built from what we consume, so we are essentially made out of our surroundings. That means that the signatures of the landscapes in which we grew up are written into our bodies – particularly into teeth, because tooth enamel is laid down in childhood. For instance, your body is constantly incorporating different stable isotopes of oxygen and strontium in various ratios. We can analyse isotopes in ancient human remains, and see how these elemental ratios match those found in the geology of places in Britain or farther afield. This can be really useful for telling where somebody grew up, for instance, or where they spent the last decade of their life.

Finally, we can extract DNA from ancient bones and sequence it. That technology has come on in leaps and bounds in recent years.

What can we learn about ancient bodies from DNA studies?
The human genome was fully sequenced in 2003. Since then we've developed the ability to extract DNA from very ancient bones, and to work out how to combine separate fragments of DNA into a complete genome. By doing that, we're able to look for rare variants that might give us clues indicating when particular groups of people moved in or out of Britain. Sometimes we're able to reconstruct more detailed information about individuals, too. One of the prehistoric skeletons I discuss in the book is known as Cheddar Man, who was discovered in Somerset in 1903, and lived around 10,000 years ago. By analysing his genome, geneticists have revealed that he probably had an unusual combination of dark skin and bright blue eyes. Being able to work that out from just a skeleton is utterly extraordinary.

DNA can also reveal information about kinship and relationships between individuals. That's been quite profound when it comes to looking at the communal burials found inside Neolithic chamber tombs, for instance. One theory about these chamber tombs is that they were intended to anonymise the dead, and therefore contain people from across the whole community. Another theory is that they effectively acted as family vaults – and some recent genetic analyses provide hints that this may indeed have been the case. For example, it's been revealed that two bodies buried together in a Neolithic monument at Primrose Grange in County Sligo, Ireland are those of a father and his daughter.

Elsewhere in Ireland, DNA analysis of a man buried at Newgrange Stone Age tomb in the Boyne valley has revealed that he was the son of an incestuous union between either a parent and a child or two siblings. So we're finding out some quite extraordinary details, some of which may not even have been public knowledge at the time of those people's deaths.

PROFILE

Professor Alice Roberts is an academic, writer and broadcaster, known for presenting BBC series such as *Coast* and *Digging for Britain*. Her previous books include *Tamed: Ten Species that Changed Our World* (Hutchinson, 2017) and *The Incredible Unlikeliness of Being* (Heron, 2014)

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVE STEVENS

Buried treasures
LEFT: Artefacts from the grave of the Amesbury Archer provide clues about daily life during the early Bronze Age
BELOW: Augustus Pitt-Rivers, the 19th-century archaeologist whose theories explored the impact of population migration on prehistoric cultures

Does genetic science have the potential to settle some major archaeological debates?
Genetic science is not a panacea. It's not as though DNA technology somehow supersedes archaeology – in fact, it could actually leave us with more questions than answers. But it does provide important strands of new evidence with the potential to answer some big questions, especially about mobility and migration. We should view it more as a tool for archaeologists to use – one that will hopefully help us see the picture more clearly.

Genetics can certainly be disruptive. In fact, it's probably as disruptive as radiocarbon dating was when that emerged, from the late 1940s – suddenly, archaeologists were able to pin absolute dates on organic material. I think you can see a similar effect playing out with DNA analysis at the moment.

There have been some instances of geneticists treading on archaeologists' toes. There's been a perception by some archaeologists that geneticists have waded into long-standing archaeological debates and simply said: "You've been arguing about this for ages. Well, now we've got the answer." Not surprisingly, archaeologists have responded: "Hang on a minute – first you need to learn a bit about archaeology and the kinds of questions we're asking."

But we've got to capitalise on the power of genetics to help us solve archaeological conundrums. In the book, I talk about a cutting-edge new project called 1,000 Ancient British Genomes, led by Swedish geneticist Pontus Skoglund of the Francis Crick Institute. This is a brilliant example of the power of collaboration between geneticists and archaeologists. Skoglund is engaging with archaeologists up and down the UK, asking them to identify questions that genetics might be able to help solve.

"There have been instances of geneticists treading on archaeologists' toes. But we've got to capitalise on the power of genetics to help us solve archaeological conundrums"

Your book is as much about the development of archaeological thinking as about the discoveries themselves. Which archaeologists most intrigue you?
One of the people I became quite obsessed with is Augustus Pitt-Rivers (1827–1900). He's best known as a collector, but he also came up with some really interesting ideas about how cultures change and evolve over time, and how these transitions happened. Pitt-Rivers was very influenced by 19th-century evolutionary theory and biology, and wondered how these ideas could apply to culture. He also started to think about whether the origins of new cultures might be linked to the movement of people.

For instance, Bronze Age people in Britain obviously had a different culture from the Neolithic people who preceded them. But where did they pick up this culture from? Pitt-Rivers suggested that there had effectively been a population replacement – that Bronze Age culture was actually brought in by a whole load of new people. He tried to back up this theory by measuring skulls, arguing that there were detectable differences between the shapes of Neolithic and Bronze Age skulls. He was trying to use the study of skulls in a similar way to how we would now use DNA studies.

What's astonishing is that DNA evidence now emerging suggests that Pitt-Rivers may have been right – that a lot of people may have arrived in Britain during the Bronze Age, largely replacing Neolithic populations. Those earlier people didn't completely disappear, but there was a really profound turnover of population. It's really interesting to think about the contact between these two groups, and about the ways in which their different cultures may have merged.

How did the preconceptions of archaeologists in the past influence their understanding of the discoveries they made?
Archaeology is a very introspective, self-aware discipline, which I think is extremely useful. We've long been aware that every archaeologist always has ideas from their own time in the back of their mind whenever they approach a set of observations.

That can impact ideas about gender, for example. Take Iron Age chariot burials: not all of them contain men – we know that some, such as the site at Wetwang in East Yorkshire, definitely contain women. I think that in the past antiquarians would have very quickly

© WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY/BRIDGEMAN

jumped to a conclusion that the body was male, based on the style of the burial or perhaps artefacts that were buried with the body. This is similar to what Reverend William Buckland (1784–1856) did when he discovered the oldest skeleton yet found in Britain, on the Gower peninsula in south Wales, which he called the "Red Lady of Paviland". The remains are clearly male, but Buckland didn't think it could possibly be a man because the individual was buried with what looked to him like ivory jewellery. As a 19th-century antiquarian, he couldn't stomach the idea that a man might be buried with jewellery.

And these ideas still persist. When we find an Iron Age burial with a sword, there's often an assumption that it's a man. Or if a mirror is excavated from a burial, there's an assumption that the remains are that of a woman. In the book, I talk about the need to avoid seeing discoveries through our own current cultural lens – to accept that there may have been many more diverse identities in the past than perhaps we understand today, for example. We think that our society and culture is normal in the way that it defines two genders, but perhaps in the past there was a much more diverse approach to identity. Certainly, if you find an Iron Age burial with both a sword *and* a mirror (and one such site has been excavated), that might be telling us something quite interesting about ancient identities.

I think that new scientific technologies encourage us to move away from our current preconceptions – to look at the evidence in isolation to begin with and then to build up a bigger picture.

One of the burials you discuss is that of the Amesbury Archer, found in Wiltshire and dating to around 2,300 BC. What does his grave tell us about the early Bronze Age?

It's a stunning discovery – the most richly furnished Copper Age burial yet found in Britain. This man was buried with almost 100 objects in his timber-lined grave, so he was certainly high status or special in some way. All sorts of things were buried with him: lots of flints and arrowheads, and stone items that we presume are wrist guards for archery – hence his name – as well as copper knives and five bell-shaped beakers. There were also gold ornaments, thought to be hair wraps or possibly earrings – the oldest gold found in Britain.

Because the Amesbury Archer was found only about three miles from Stonehenge, some have suggested that he may have had a link with that site. That may be true, but we'll never be able to prove it. You can also speculate about who he was – his position in that society: are we looking at some kind of Bronze Age shaman or magician? And, connected with that idea, what did people think of those who first developed the ability to extract metal out of stone? It must have been amazing to see a completely new material being produced.

What I find particularly interesting about the Amesbury Archer is that analysis of the stable isotopes in his remains shows that he wasn't a local – in fact, he grew up in or near the Alps. Graves such as his show just how far these connections stretched, and the distances that people were travelling. There's this popular idea that in the ancient past people never travelled farther than the next village, but now we have evidence of some, such as the Amesbury Archer, travelling hundreds of miles in a lifetime.

Another of the discoveries you discuss is the Pocklington chariot burial in East Yorkshire. Why was that such an exciting find?

That burial, found in 2017, is absolutely spectacular. I was lucky enough to visit it with the team that discovered it. We don't see many Iron Age burials across most of Britain, but in Yorkshire several very characteristic chariot burials have been found. These belonged to the Arras culture, which had connections to the near continent and possibly brought this very distinctive funerary style with them.

That Pocklington grave contains the body of a man buried within a chariot. In other similar burials, the chariots tend to have been dismantled before being put in the grave – flatpacked, essentially. This one, though, was standing up and intact, with the man placed inside in a crouching position.

Riding into the afterlife The Iron Age chariot burial found in Pocklington, East Yorkshire in 2017. Two ponies were buried standing up in the grave; the logistics involved in placing them there continue to puzzle archaeologists

Along with the grave, there's evidence of a funeral feast. You get the impression that this funeral was a great spectacle, intended to show off the status of the deceased individual but also that of the surviving family. There are animal bones in the grave, including a rack of ribs, so it looks as if dishes from the feast were being shared with the deceased individual.

The other utterly extraordinary thing is that two pony skeletons were found standing up in the grave. That was just unbelievable. We spent quite a long time scratching our heads, wondering how on earth they got those ponies in there upright. Did they winch dead animals into the grave and then somehow support them, maybe piling up the soil underneath to hold them in a standing position? Or were the ponies led into the grave and then killed? I don't know if we'll ever quite get to the bottom of how it was achieved, but obviously it was extremely important to the design of the grave to have the chariot looking as though it was ready to depart, taking the dead man off, possibly to the afterlife. That is, of course, if they believed in the afterlife – we don't know!

Do you think we learn anything about ourselves by looking at prehistoric Britain?

I think that exploring prehistory shows us just how multicultural Britain has always been. What we've seen is that many different groups of people have crossed the North Sea and the Channel in both directions over time, and that those cultures all enriched the others.

Although I write a lot about the power of genetics, I don't think we should be trying to trace direct genetic links between us and people in the ancient past because, once you get back into prehistory, these connections aren't terribly meaningful. You don't need to have a direct genetic link with the Red Lady of Paviland or the Amesbury Archer to think about what the lives of these individuals might have been like. I'm aiming for an egalitarian approach to ancestry in the landscape. The "ancestors" I look at in the book belong to everybody. H

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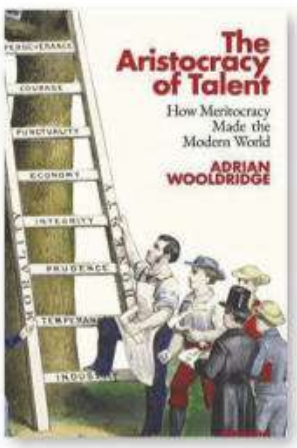
Merit or money?
Eton schoolboys in 1939. In the 20th century "elites learned to beat the meritocrats at their own game", argues a new book by Adrian Wooldridge

EDUCATION

Best and brightest?

PETER MANDLER considers a sweeping analysis of meritocracy's role in shaping the western world and debates the effectiveness of attempts to usher in equality



The Aristocracy of Talent: How Meritocracy Made the Modern World
by Adrian Wooldridge
Allen Lane, 496 pages, £25

In this readable and wide-ranging book, Adrian Wooldridge – sitting tenant of the "Bagehot" column in *The Economist* – brings a historical perspective to the current "crisis of the meritocracy", in which meritocratic values and institutions (especially educational ones) are assailed from both the left and populist right as mystified bastions of privilege. Against this attack, Wooldridge maintains that meritocracy is revolutionary and egalitarian. He makes life easier for himself by foraying backwards, as far as Plato, focusing especially on the long haul from the Enlightenment to the brink of the present, when hereditary privilege was challenged by new meritocratic ideals of ability and hard work. There are few defenders of feudalism nowadays to argue otherwise.

Wooldridge has many tales to tell of doughty crusaders for truth and justice fighting against entrenched and unearned privileges. The story is a familiar one of "the rise of the west". Our old friends the Renaissance, the Protestant work ethic, the Enlightenment, the American and French Revolutions, the industrial revolution with its cohort of self-made men, and the dawn of competitive examinations in the 19th century all play their appointed roles. Indeed, Wooldridge has a habit of name-checking conventional claims for the rise of the west – about its embrace of rationality, economic growth, liberty and democracy – and telling us these are really about meritocracy. Thus meritocracy plays the starring role that in some other accounts might have been assigned to Magna Carta, Protestantism or the Enlightenment.

In its "rise of the west" version, this account has been challenged repeatedly over the last half century by historians whose optic is more global. I'm not sure many serious students of China and India would see their societies or economies as static, in the way Wooldridge does, reminiscent of old Orientalist canards. The extraordinary resource extraction accomplished by slavery, empire and unequal trade does not feature here, despite an avalanche of historical argument on these subjects. Unleashed "talent" – or, often, "genius" – is all that is credited.

This "talent" appears in highly disparate guises. Meritocratic virtue is attributed not

BRIDGEMAN

only to inventors, philosophers and Oxbridge dons (the latter have the highest profile throughout), but also to robber barons, the corrupt bosses of urban American political machines, and to any British prime minister who didn't go to public school. Perhaps this capaciousness is inevitable in a sweeping argument about meritocracy as the maker of the modern world, but considerable loss of analytical bite is a by-product.

One more fruitful by-product of this sweeping historical approach is that Wooldridge is able to show how stubbornly persistent acceptance of inherited privilege has been. "Feudalism" may have been defeated by the 18th century, but the power and practices of a hereditary ruling class were not. Civil service exams may have been opened to competition in the 19th century, but civil servants' political bosses remained mostly landed aristocrats well into the 20th century. The public schools retained a substantial share of secondary (and therefore higher) education until the Second World War. Oxbridge still had special "scholarships" for graduates of famous public schools until the 1960s. Thus it was only in the golden postwar decades that meritocracy finally came of age, driven by one motor above all – selective education and its favoured instrument: the IQ test. The grammar school boys of England, the "énarques" (graduates of the elite civil service college in France, ENA), and the "best and the brightest" from the Ivy League clustering around JFK in the United States were at last sitting on top of the world.

In general, Wooldridge believes that meritocracy is "self-correcting": each new wave of meritocratic elites has a tendency to consolidate itself into a new privileged caste, but is then challenged and swept away by another wave. Yet he also recognises that this tendency is not inevitable. As formulated by Michael Young's *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958), which more or less coined the term, meritocracy can become a screen for (mostly inherited) privilege. As Wooldridge observes, elites – finding their claim to privilege coming under increasing attack in the 20th century – learned to beat the meritocrats at their own game. Public schools started to train students for exams, so they could earn rather than just assume their Oxbridge places. Landed families went into business to protect and accumulate their capital.

Young pointed out that privilege held by traditional elites was if anything strengthened by meritocratic defence. The "new" ruling class held its power as just deserts, recognised by the rest of the population. Educational attainment became the one true sign of virtue. For Young, this had anti-social as well as anti-democratic implications: the power hierarchy was restored on a very narrow basis that acknowledged only one kind of "merit": that demonstrated in academic exams.

In truth this tendency was already in operation during Wooldridge's golden age, though he chooses not to look too closely at it. Grammar schools were mostly promoting the already privileged; they proved no better (though also no worse) than comprehensive schools at boosting the under-privileged. In the 1940s, nearly half of his favoured énarques were children of previous énarques, and by the 1970s, nearly two-thirds. Since the 1970s this tendency has deepened. Educational hierarchy today is as entrenched as ever, and has also become more important, precisely because of the economic and social as well as cultural and intellectual power concentrated in the "cognitive elite"

"Meritocracy plays the starring role in the 'rise of the west' that in other accounts might be assigned to Magna Carta or the Enlightenment"

that Wooldridge otherwise wants to celebrate. Young's nightmare has come to life: the "cognitive elite" are all-powerful, arrogant, unassailable.

And yet Wooldridge's major prescription for this dreadful state of affairs is more meritocracy: defined narrowly as more IQ tests, more selective education, more rewards and more power to an educational elite. Worryingly he is tempted by the Chinese (and Plato's) "guardian discourse", paternalistically vesting power in the allegedly "wisest" heads. It's hard to see how more inequality generated by educational selection, however apparently well "justified" or responsibly exercised, and less democracy, is going to quell the political revolts against vested privilege from right and left that he most fears. It's also hard to see how these measures are ever likely to break up an entrenched meritocratic elite. If anything is going to knock them – us – off our perch, it's not going to be another exam. H

Peter Mandler is the author of *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education Since the Second World War* (OUP, 2020)

AUTHORS ON THE PODCAST

Ayanna Thompson on the history of blackface

"Blackface has a very long history. It may even have been used in Greek and Roman theatre, and we know that blackface was used in medieval religious plays to depict devilish characters who had fallen from grace. But it flourished in Shakespeare's time, with non-religious plays that explored the plethora of the world. We think that bitumen, makeup and even fake noses were used to create blackface on the Renaissance stage."

John Higgs on poet and painter William Blake

"People have often misunderstood Blake's work. And sometimes they've got it so wrong it's ironic. *Jerusalem* is the obvious example. It's now an unofficial British anthem, but Blake intended it as an angry rant to condemn the 'hirelings' of the British establishment. It's a cry to overthrow our idiot rulers and the stupid schools and universities they came from. So when you see public schools singing *Jerusalem*, they're actually singing along to a rallying call to burn those places down."

Leah Garrett on Jewish refugees who fought for Britain in WW2

"Most X-troopers arrived in their early teens by themselves and had to make their way through the UK day by day. They were deeply traumatised because they had all lost their families and homes. But they came here alone because their parents decided that they had to do this to make sure they survived."

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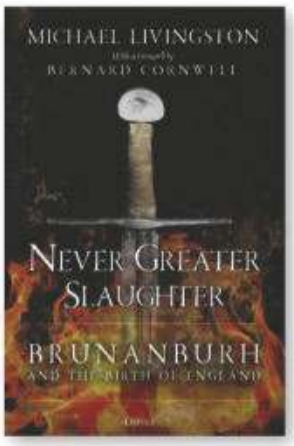
ANGLO-SAXON

Redrawing the battleground

MICHAEL WOOD gives his verdict on an ambitious book that attempts to finally provide a definitive location for one of the most famous battles in Anglo-Saxon history



Never Greater Slaughter: Brunanburh and the Birth of England
by Michael Livingston
Osprey, 224 pages, £20

I'm a fan of Bernard Cornwell. There, I admit it. I really enjoyed *Last Kingdom*. The sweep of 70 years of this electric time in English history was a feat of imagination, told with verve and relish. Of course most of his story didn't actually happen, but you don't have to believe it. It's fiction. Cornwell composed the introduction to Michael Livingston's new book, and his name appears large on the cover. So does his aura: the epic title, the smoking sword, the *Last Kingdom*-esque graphics.

It's a great story, of course: the 937 invasion of England by a huge coalition of North Britons and Vikings; the epic struggle at Brunanburh, long remembered as the "Great Battle". But despite its fame, the site is lost. Not even the general location is known for certain, and the debate is getting heated.

Livingston is not a historian of the 10th century; he's a scholar of Middle English literature, and the author of historical fantasy novels. A few years ago he edited a "casebook" on Brunanburh, pulling the sources together – an interesting idea compromised by having no Anglo-Saxon historian on board. This lapse confirmed the book's aim: to fix the Wirral as the location of the battle.

Now with his newest offering, he gives us a full-scale reconstruction of events. It is a hard book to review. No historian of the Old English period would say he or she knows where Brunanburh was, but Livingston confidently gives us a battle map with troop dispositions across the M53. It is uncontentious to say, then, that the book goes far beyond what the sources allow, into realms of pure imagination.

I've had my say on this recently in academic articles, and in this magazine. But to recapitulate: no source suggests the events of 937 took place in the Wirral. In my view none of the many objections to the Wirral thesis are answered in this book: for example John of Worcester's statement that the invaders landed in the Humber; William of Malmesbury's account of the submission of the Northumbrians; the problematical spelling of the name Brun(n)anburh; the far-fetched interpretation of the poetic phrase *on dinges mere* ("on the noisy sea") as referring to Thingwall in the Wirral.

I have other reservations: the potentially very interesting numismatic evidence is not included, while recent scholarship on 10th-century warfare in England and on the continent is not considered – nor are the finds at Torksey which have transformed our view of Viking armies. The claimed archaeological "evidence" is unpublished and unverified, with no proof offered that the metalworking finds are even of the 10th century.

Clash of swords An illustration of the battle of Brunanburh, an epic clash fought in AD 937

> **"The epic struggle at Brunanburh is known as the 'Great Battle'. But despite its fame, the site is lost – not even its general location is known for certain"**

Above all, there is no explanation of why an army drawn from North Britain, Ireland and the Hebrides which invaded Northumbria should have ended up in the Wirral. To explain this improbable plot twist the master storyteller Cornwell resorts to the saga man's trusted device: like duellists, the enemies had agreed to fight on a chosen field. Livingston however has no explanation – but then, what could there be?

This brings us to the question of method. Imagination is an important tool for the historian. But it has to be balanced by judgment. Livingston gives us a breezy lecture at the start about what he thinks historians do. For most of us it starts with careful discussion of sources: judicious weighing of the evidence. What is this source? When was it written, and what is its bias? What sources did it use? Does it say what I think it says? And am I using it to confirm an already fixed opinion rather than testing my views in an open-minded search for what happened?

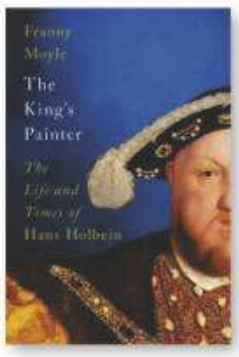
To my mind, this is what Michael Livingston does in *Never Greater Slaughter*. Led by the deeply flawed Wirral hypothesis, and energised by Cornwell's verve – his gift of conjuring apparently real worlds, gritty, blood soaked and heroic – he has created a picture of the events of 937 that still lacks the solid proof to make it convincing. The Brunanburh mystery continues! H

Michael Wood is a historian, broadcaster and professor in public history at the University of Manchester

AKG IMAGES

TUDOR

Paint as propaganda



The King's Painter: The Life and Times of Hans Holbein
by Franny Moyle
Apollo, 576 pages, £35

Say the name Henry VIII and the chances are a Holbein portrait will spring to mind: the king in dominant pose with hands on hips, legs astride and piercing dark eyes. The most celebrated painter of the Tudor age did more to shape Henry's public persona than any of the able ministers who surrounded him.

By the time Holbein was appointed as king's painter in around 1535, Henry needed all the help he could get. The annulment of his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon, and the seismic religious reforms that followed, had sparked widespread resistance. To make matters worse, the king's second wife, Anne Boleyn, had so far failed to give him the son that he so desperately needed to secure his dynasty. With his reign in crisis, Henry needed more than just a typical court painter: he needed a spin doctor, an image maker, a PR man.

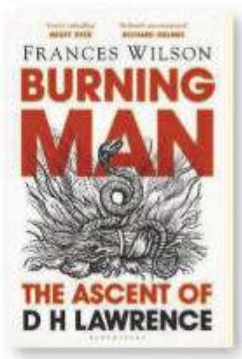
Holbein fitted the bill perfectly and, as this vivid and engaging new biography shows, his influence on Henry's image would be profound. He is responsible for creating the impression of a stridently majestic, imposing and invincible monarch, who could inspire both terror and devotion in his subjects. He also held up a mirror to Henry's court: his queens, children and favourites. Holbein's portraits are so lifelike that, as Moyle puts it, "the faces he shows us might at any moment blink or take a sudden breath".

Drawing on extensive research, Moyle proves that Holbein was so much more than just a painter. A true polymath, he could turn his hand to jewellery, statuary and book design, political propaganda, religious art, satire and humanism. Although *The King's Painter* is fascinating for the fresh perspective it gives of the Tudor world, its greatest achievement is to bring Holbein out from behind his easel and show him in all his brilliant, multi-faceted, human glory. H

Tracy Borman, author of *Henry VIII and the Men Who Made Him* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2018)

20TH CENTURY

In search of genius



Burning Man: The Ascent of DH Lawrence
by Frances Wilson
Bloomsbury, 512 pages, £25

DH Lawrence has proven to be an endlessly fascinating subject for biographers. There is his working-class upbringing as the son of a collier; the scholarships he won to Nottingham High School and University College Nottingham; his tempestuous marriage to Frieda Weekley (née von Richthofen); his restless, peripatetic search for new modes of being after the catastrophe of the Great War; his fortitude in the face of lifelong illness; and, of course, the courage and beauty of his writing in every major genre.

He is rightly celebrated today for his achievement as a writer on sex and the life of the body. In this latest popular biography of the author, Frances Wilson argues that his real "genius" is felt not in his work as a novelist but as an essayist, poet, literary critic and travel writer.

The originality of Wilson's approach lies in the way that she shapes Lawrence's life along the outlines of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with the "Inferno" covering the war years and their aftermath, "Purgatory" being his years living in Florence, Capri and Sicily, 1919–22, and "Paradise" his years in New Mexico and Mexico, 1922–25. The book dwells in detail on Lawrence's fascinating interactions with Maurice Magnus (an American whom he met in Florence in 1919, and whose spendthrift ways at once intrigued and appalled him) and Mabel Dodge Sterne (a patron of the arts who invited him to the American south-west to record Native American culture). It pays extended attention to lesser-known works such as the *Memoir of Maurice Magnus*, *Studies in Classic American Literature* and the essays in *Mornings in Mexico*.

The book is refreshingly opinionated – sometimes startlingly so. Lawrence's novel *The Lost Girl* is described, for instance, as "engagingly bonkers", and *The Plumed Serpent* as "boring, at times brutally so". The aficionado may flinch. But what emerges is a vivid picture of a complex, difficult, haunted man whose art was driven by conflict. H

Andrew Harrison, director of the DH Lawrence Research Centre at the University of Nottingham

GETTY IMAGES

YOU RECOMMEND

We asked our Twitter followers for their top books on women's history...

@WalthoKrystal
Bad Girls by Caitlin Davies. A captivating account of the experiences of different women in the judicial system for over a century.

@DufferRoy
One Hand Tied Behind Us by Jill Liddington & Jill Norris is an extensive history of women's right to universal suffrage. It highlights many lesser-known women, the ground swell that bore fruit in 1918 and the continuing fight for equality.

@MrNilsson27
The Five by Hallie Rubenhold. Excellent book about the five "canonical" victims of Jack the Ripper that gives the victims their due.

@jess_dinning
Women vs Hollywood by Helen O' Hara. One of the most informative history books I've read. Doesn't shy away from the dark moments, but also manages to celebrate women's achievements.

@RebeccaCliffor4
Helen McCarthy's *Double Lives*, currently on the shortlist for the Wolfson History Prize. It will speak to any working mother (or working parent).

@AlisonShawGriff
Antonia Fraser's *The Weaker Vessel*. Read it in 1985 and it inspired me to do a history degree. Still love dipping into it for the anecdotes of 17th-century women's lives.

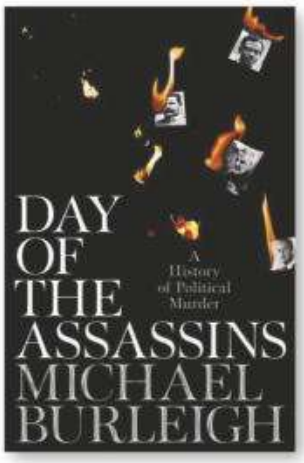
@LooneySeb
Helen of Troy by Bettany Hughes. Very interesting to read how Helen [pictured right] was robbed of her agency by medieval scholars and twisted into a completely different character.

@AdnaanFarooq2
Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World by Ruby Lal. A thoughtful enquiry into the public presence of the Timurid women – something that remains absent in the western narratives.

GLOBAL

Scheming and slaughter

NIGEL JONES appraises an extensive survey of assassinations throughout history, from the blood-soaked stabbings of ancient Rome to the drone strikes of modern warfare



Day of the Assassins: A History of Political Murder
by Michael Burleigh
Picador, 448 pages, £25

Considering its frequency, assassination – the murder mainly of rulers and politicians – has not attracted much attention from serious historians, so it is refreshing to see that Professor Michael Burleigh has devoted a thoughtful and eminently readable book to the subject.

It is often said that assassination changes nothing, but that is clearly untrue. The killing of Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand triggered events that led to the First World War, and millions of lives could have been saved if the bombs set by either Georg Elser or Claus von Stauffenberg had succeeded in killing Hitler.

Burleigh begins with a dramatic account of one of the most documented (not least by Shakespeare) assassinations in history: the stabbing of Julius Caesar by multiple members of the Roman Senate in 44 BC. Caesar's death illustrates a recurring theme of the book – the law of unintended consequences. The conspirators butchered Caesar because they feared his dictatorial intentions and wanted to restore the Roman republic. Instead, by not wiping out his friends and family too, their actions led directly to the long line of Roman emperors, starting with Octavian, the man who took bloody revenge on them, and became the first emperor, Augustus.

Briskly running through such assassination-rich periods as the Byzantine empire (no fewer than 65 emperors were assassinated) and the 16th-century French Wars of Religion brings Burleigh to the modern period in which he is most at home. Along the way he discusses such topics as the theological justification for tyrannicide, and the portrayal of assassination by Dante and Machiavelli during the murderous Italian Renaissance.

Among his conclusions are that assassinations are almost always either the result of conspiracy, or the work of lone fanatics prepared to sacrifice themselves along with their victims. Since most of the killings are carried out in public, few assassins escape the scene of their crime: brief exceptions to this rule being the killers of presidents Lincoln and Kennedy, John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald, and James Earl Ray who shot US civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. But all three were soon hunted down. Almost uniquely, the assassin of Swedish premier Olof Palme in the 1980s remains unknown.

"The day of the skulking anarchist assassin with bomb in hand may be done, but the day of the spy in the sky dealing out anonymous mass death has arrived"

Towards the end of the book Burleigh goes off piste and ceases to consider individual assassinations of prominent leaders, instead looking at the mass deaths in conflicts which such killings often let loose, such as the Rwandan genocide, the Lebanese civil wars and the targeted killings of Palestinians by the Israeli secret services. He predicts that the future of assassination will see more state-sanctioned killings such as the dismembering of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, or the poisoning of opponents of Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Nor can the west escape with morally clean hands from this bloody escalation in assassinations. Burleigh points out that even under the liberal president Barack Obama, many innocent civilians – along with enemy combatants – died in US drone strikes directed by "pilots" sitting safely in offices thousands of miles away.

The day of the skulking anarchist assassin with smoking bomb in hand may be done, but the day of the spy in the sky dealing out anonymous mass death has arrived. It is a very discomforting prospect. H

Nigel Jones is a historian and writer whose books include *Countdown to Valkyrie* (Frontline, 2009)

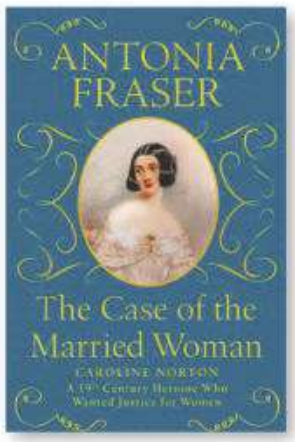
AKG IMAGES

A stab in the back The killing of Julius Caesar (as seen in a painting by Vincenzo Camuccini) demonstrates the "law of unintended consequences" that often follows political murders, argues a new book by Michael Burleigh

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Marriage of misery

FERN RIDDELL recommends a vivid biography of a women's rights campaigner who shook off the shackles of married life



The Case of the Married Woman
by Antonia Fraser
Orion, 304 pages, £25

"She does not exist: her husband exists…" This is how Antonia Fraser opens her new epoch on the life of Caroline Norton, one of the most important female writers of the early Victorian era. Norton wrote these words in her 1854 pamphlet *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century*. It came nearly 20 years after she had left her abusive husband, George, a move that saw her children removed from her, while she remained in the thrall of a man who continued to receive all of her earnings as an author. Her life and writings are vividly realised in Fraser's new analysis of the woman and her words, straddling both the Regency and Victorian eras in the fight for women's rights as wives, mothers and workers.

Norton herself has been widely studied and is a common subject for researchers today, so one might wonder what potential there is for someone to say anything new. But in Fraser's book the woman who leaps from the page is vastly complex, at times almost unlikeable, and yet equally unforgettable. Tracing Norton's life from her childhood to her marriage – committed to almost by accident in the wake of a tragically broken heart – to her boredom with her husband, her rise in high society and her rumoured affair with Lord Melbourne, Fraser presents us with a witty, beautiful young woman who enjoyed the flirtatious conversation of intelligent men.

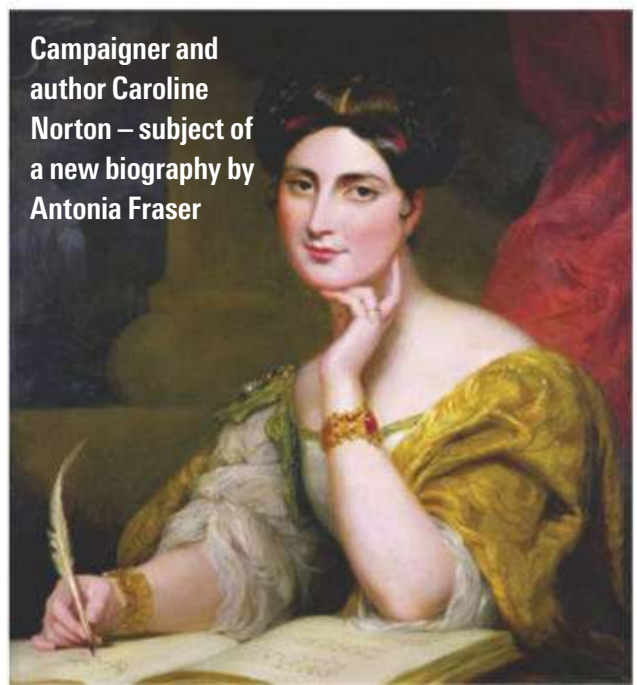
Fraser makes it very clear why the women of Norton's set took against her in her early years, allowing "a kind of female misogyny to prevail in their judgments: it was as though it was really too much for one woman to be beautiful, talented – and extremely attractive to men".

This lack of female kinship worked against Norton when her husband attempted to ruin her reputation, and that of Lord Melbourne, with a court case accusing the pair of adultery. The scandal, and its surprising outcome in Caroline's favour, did not leave her vindicated. But it's here, in that tattered, rejected world, that Fraser begins to rebuild Caroline Norton, not as others saw her, but as she herself intended. Though at times bitter and vengeful, angry and ignored, she was always determined to change the society around her that judged women so harshly and spared men so much.

Peppered throughout this retelling is Fraser's ability to capture snapshots of the other brilliant stars in Norton's universe. Lord Melbourne, a feature of so many period dramas surrounding Queen Victoria, is given more tangible life with the revelation that "he spoke with the inimitable Whig accent of his forebears in which, for example, 'gold' became 'goold' and Rome 'Room'".

For those who wish for a detailed history of one of the most important female figures of the 19th century and the world around her, this is an ideal read. Fraser's illuminating book shows how Caroline Norton's presence in 19th-century society still has so much to say about the rights women lack and the abuses they suffer, even today. H

Fern Riddell's latest book is *Sex: Lessons from History* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2021)


Campaigner and author Caroline Norton – subject of a new biography by Antonia Fraser

ALAMY/JAN KLOS

> **"Caroline's children were removed from her, while her husband continued to profit from her earnings"**

FROM FACT TO FICTION

All at sea

Alix Nathan on her Napoleonic-era novel *Sea Change*

Your novel is set in early 19th-century Britain – what was the atmosphere then?
Britain went to war with France after years of anxiety about the revolution: would revolution happen here? The government was repressive; there were masses of spies. Then war began and threat was no longer purely internal: surely Napoleon would invade in boats, balloons, on rafts. Mobilisation was large-scale; news of victories and disasters abroad kept up the constant disturbance. Limping, limbless soldiers and sailors were a common sight.

It was a time also of great inequality, impoverishment, bankruptcies and machine-breaking, together with great technical and scientific development.

Introduce us to your characters and where they fit into this landscape.
My two main characters are Sarah and her daughter Eve, separated as a result of a balloon journey in 1802 to celebrate the hopeless Peace of Amiens, which lasted barely more than a year. Each believes the other is dead, and how they cope with that is the basis of the novel.

Napoleon tyrannised Europe, and tyranny is reflected by two other characters: a disenchanted parson who oppresses his wife and congregation, and the artist who gives Eve a home. The artist's tyranny is a result of his mental condition, and disturbed mental states concern another character: a doctor who persuades people to take the smallpox vaccine and patches up both injured Luddites and returning war-wounded.

Why are you drawn back to historical settings as a novelist?
The early 19th century is rich in extraordinary, often dreadful events (my source is a run of *Annual Registers*). As a novelist, I want to explore experiences of loss, love, ambition, superstition, delight and despair – universal emotions, however unfamiliar the setting.

Sea Change
by Alix Nathan
Serpent's Tail, 256 pages, £14.99

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WORDS BY **ELLIE CAWTHORNE** AND **MATT ELTON**

ELF ALSO ON THE BOOKSHELF

18TH CENTURY

Inheritance: The Lost History of Mary Davies
by Leo Hollis
(Oneworld, 304 pages, £20)

Fatal inheritance

As a baby, Mary Davies had inherited vast swathes of land in London, making her a target for fortune-hunters. One day in 1701 she woke up with a man in her bed and just hours later found herself married. When her husband sought to seize control of her assets, a court case ensued – exposing a tale of lies, coercion and opium-laced strawberries, as described in Leo Hollis's compelling new book.

BIOGRAPHY

Churchill & Son
by Josh Ireland
(John Murray, 400 pages, £20)

Father and son

Winston Churchill was, says Josh Ireland, "obsessed with his son" Randolph. In charting their close but combustible relationship, Ireland offers a new perspective on one of history's giants. But perhaps even more interesting is the story of a son who was unable to follow in his father's footsteps – a talented man who "exploded into rooms" but was ultimately undone by "colossal faults" and self-sabotage.

MEMOIR

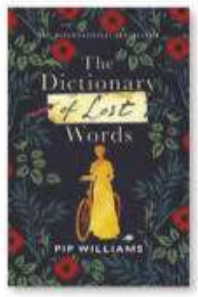
Black Teacher
by Beryl Gilroy
(Faber & Faber, 288 pages, £12.99)

Battling bigotry

First published in 1976, Beryl Gilroy's witty, frank memoir recounts her attempts to make her way as a Caribbean immigrant in postwar Britain. Arriving from British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1952, Gilroy battled bigotry to forge a career as a teacher, and her hugely readable book, republished with a foreword by novelist Bernardine Evaristo, offers insights into the challenges faced by the Windrush generation.

FICTION

The Dictionary of Lost Words
by Pip Williams
(Chatto & Windus, 432 pages, £14.99)



Defining moments

A team of Victorian scholars huddle in a garden shed grandly named the "Scriptorium", compiling entries for the Oxford English Dictionary. Lexicographer's daughter Esme grows up in this world of words – but, as she comes to realise that not all dictionary entries are treated equally, she begins work on her own volume of "lost" language. Real and fictional timelines are intertwined in this inventive new novel.

CHILDREN'S

Adventures in Time: The Six Wives of Henry VIII
by Dominic Sandbrook
(Particular Books, 176 pages, £14.99)

Annulled, beheaded, survived

Historian, broadcaster and *BBC History Magazine* contributor Dominic Sandbrook turns his hand to writing for children with his new *Adventures in Time* series. This instalment explores the stories of the six wives of Henry VIII, bringing their real experiences vividly to life via a sequence of dramatic cliffhangers. Another title exploring the Second World War is also available, with more set for later in 2021.

WW1

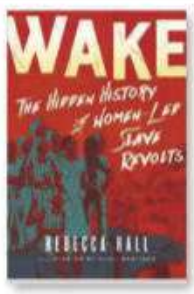
The Confidence Men
by Margalit Fox
(Profile, 352 pages, £16.99)

Spirited away

Rarely has a means of escape seemed as unlikely as a handmade Ouija board and a fake seance – yet a pair of British officers used precisely those tools to trick their way out of a Turkish PoW camp during the First World War. Margalit Fox's book explores how the men used psychology to dupe camp staff over many months – and how it nearly cost them their mental health and physical safety.

GRAPHIC NOVEL

Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Riots
by Rebecca Hall and Hugo Martinez
(Particular Books, 208 pages, £20)



Drawing on the past

Vividly illustrated in black and white, this graphic novel tells the stories of enslaved women who fought for freedom on plantations and slave ships. Flitting between past and present, and blending historical research, memoir and dramatic licence, it's an idiosyncratic but powerful exploration of how this historical legacy still has a significant impact on identities in the 21st century.

AFRICA

Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes
by Barnaby Phillips
(Oneworld, 400 pages, £20)

Taking stock

Debate continues to rage over whether the Benin Bronzes held in London's British Museum should be returned to Africa. Barnaby Phillips focuses instead on their origins, investigating their medieval authors, and what they can tell us about Africa's culture and history. He also follows the events that brought them to Europe in 1897, and explores changing views of how we should curate the past. H

Gold and gore

A c1180–90 enamelled reliquary casket depicting the killing (below) and burial (above) of Thomas Becket. It is one of the artefacts included in a new British Museum exhibition on his murder

TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY: VISIT / WATCH / LISTEN / TASTE
By **Jonathan Wright, Samantha Nott** and **Matt Elton**

VISIT

Murder and depravity

In recent weeks, several museums and heritage sites around the country have reopened. We've selected a handful of exhibition highlights across the coming pages; in all cases, it's worth checking booking requirements in advance, as well as any Covid regulations in the area.

Two major highlights are on offer at the British Museum in London. The first charts the life and death of Thomas Becket – the archbishop of Canterbury murdered by followers of Henry II in 1170. This new exhibition features a wealth of artefacts, including a 12th-century enamelled casket depicting Becket's murder (shown left).

Another British Museum exhibition examines the life and times of a much more infamous figure: Roman emperor Nero. Despite his first-century reign becoming synonymous with depravity and debauchery, new research suggests that might not be the whole story: instead, Nero may have been a populist leader at a time of great social change.

Thomas Becket: Murder and the Making of a Saint
The British Museum / Until 22 August / Booking required

Nero: The Man Behind the Myth
The British Museum / Until 24 October / Booking required
britishmuseum.org

LISTEN

Secret talks

Henry Kissinger meets a Chinese delegation in Beijing, 1971. A new documentary looks at how the visit shaped global relations

US president Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972 was a key moment in the People's Republic being accepted back into the international community. Yet it would never have happened without Henry Kissinger, then US national security advisor, making a clandestine trip to Beijing a year earlier, in July 1971.

The 48-hour visit took place at a time when China was isolated and, because of the Cultural Revolution, in chaos. Meanwhile the US was looking for a way to extricate itself from the war in Vietnam and sorely needed a foreign policy success – which arrived as Kissinger, who met with Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, began to navigate a route towards Nixon's historic handshake with Mao Zedong.

Five decades on, *The Guardian*'s China affairs correspondent, Vincent Ni, looks back at Kissinger's visit. In the wake of Donald Trump's antagonism towards Beijing, there is talk of a second Cold War, and Ni considers how and why we came to this situation. He also asks whether Joe Biden and Xi Jinping can learn any lessons from the diplomacy conducted by a previous political generation.

When Kissinger Went to China
BBC World Service / Saturday 12 June

A scene from 1982 film *Tron*, whose pioneering CGI proved to be a milestone in cinema visual effects

LISTEN

New ways of seeing

The way we visualise the future has a rich cultural and technological history – as highlighted in the new BBC Radio 4 series *Unreal*. Presented by visual effects specialist Paul Franklin, who won Academy Awards for *Inception* and *Interstellar*, it charts the story from Stanley Kubrick's 1968 epic *2001: A Space Odyssey* onwards.

A key moment in the narrative comes in 1975, with the founding of Industrial Light & Magic by George Lucas, who wanted to show effects never seen before on screen as he planned *Star Wars* (1977). The three-part documentary traces how visual effects have since become central to so many films – especially, but not exclusively, Hollywood blockbusters. The rise of computer-generated imagery (CGI), pioneered in 1982's *Tron*, features prominently.

Unreal: The VFX Revolution
BBC Radio 4 / Expected to air in early July

George V on his visit to Ireland, 1921. A new two-part documentary explores how the island was divided

WATCH

Divided island

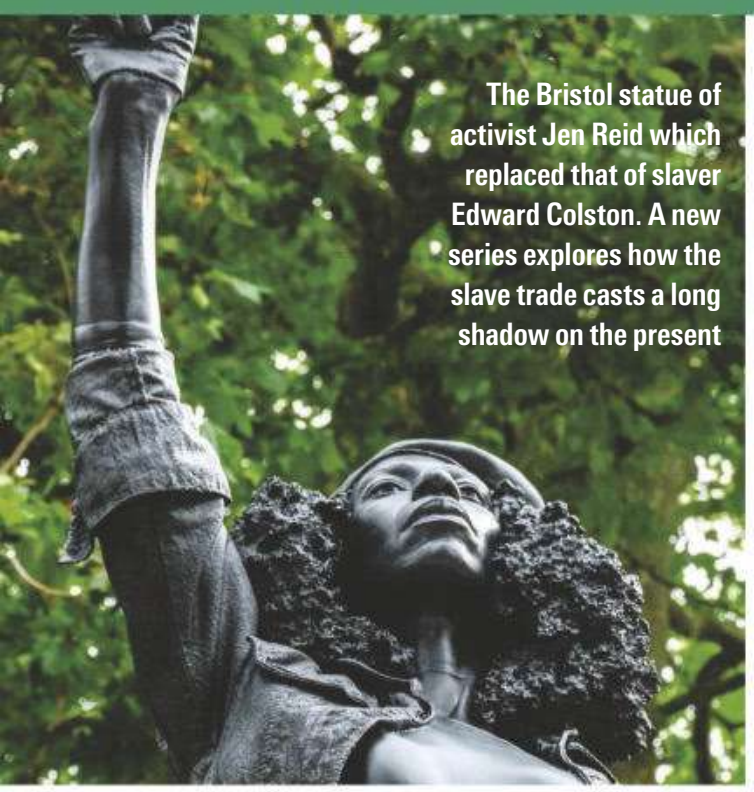
On 22 June 1921, King George V and Queen Mary arrived in Belfast. The Irish War of Independence, a guerrilla conflict fought between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and forces associated with the British state, had yet to end. Visiting a city so scarred by sectarian violence was a huge security risk – yet it was seen as a necessary gamble, because George was in Northern Ireland for the official state opening of its first parliament.

It was an assembly dominated by the Ulster Unionist Party, which won two-thirds of the popular vote, a result that shocked many in the republican Sinn Féin Party. "I speak from a full heart when I pray that my coming to Ireland today may prove to be the first step towards the end of strife amongst her people," George noted.

But how did Ireland reach a situation where it was divided and where George, whose hopes have yet to be fulfilled, was sent to make such a speech on behalf of the British state? This story is told in a two-part documentary that mixes archive footage and expert insight as it looks at events leading up to Ireland's partition a century ago.

The Road to Partition
BBC iPlayer / Available now

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



The Bristol statue of activist Jen Reid which replaced that of slaver Edward Colston. A new series explores how the slave trade casts a long shadow on the present

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

LISTEN

Troubled legacies

Britain's slave-trading history continues to play into the present. Not just because of memorials to long-dead figures or musty records held in archives, but because so many of us have family histories that link us, within a very few generations, to the oppressed or to those who owned and traded human beings – or even to both.

This idea of connection is central to *Descendants*, narrated by poet Yrsa Daley-Ward, which introduces listeners to people linked, often in surprising ways, to slavery and to each other. The series begins with activist Jen Reid. It was a statue of Reid giving a black power salute that briefly replaced the toppled Edward Colston on a plinth in Bristol last year.

We also meet, among others, Gayle Heron, the sister of musician Gil Scott-Heron (1949–2011), Conservative MP James Cleverley, and Mark Cropper, who is descended from abolitionist James Cropper (1773–1840).

"Although I recognise how connected we are, the very extent to which these stories interlink and touch each other still caught me by surprise," noted Daley-Ward when the series, made with the support of University College London's Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, was announced.

Descendants
BBC Radio 4 and BBC Sounds / Airing each Friday

WEEKLY TV & RADIO
Visit **historyextra.com** for weekly updates on upcoming television and radio programmes

HISTORY ON THE AIRWAVES

"Arguments we have in Scotland are played out in many ways through literature and theatre"

Journalist and *Newsnight* presenter **KIRSTY WARK** tells us about her new radio series that explores how literature, history and identity intersect in Scotland – and how writers have shaped how Scotland is perceived

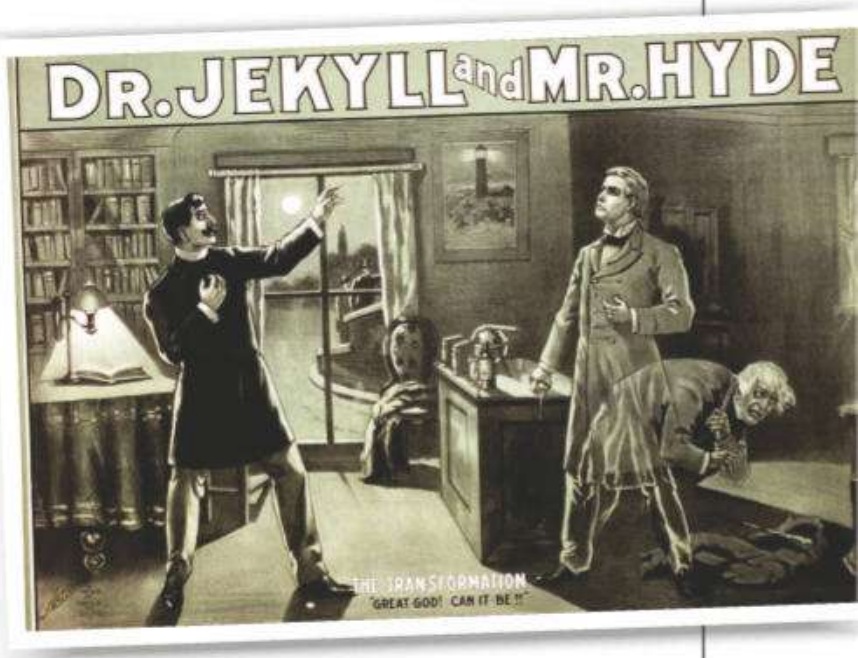
What's the thinking that lies behind the approach of *Written in Scotland*?
The arguments that we have in Scotland, with ourselves and with others, are played out in many ways through literature – and theatre, actually. Our literature is very close to us. If I can put it this way, one thing I would ask you to do is read Donald Dewar's brilliant opening speech to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. What other first minister would have invoked Robert Burns, Walter Scott and the language of the Mearns [the former county of Kincardineshire] in a very short opening address and in front of the Queen? It encapsulated a lot of what Scotland's about. We have a concern about identity that's gone on for more than 400 years, ever since the [1603] union of the crowns – a discussion with ourselves, about who we are and what's important to us, through our literature.

How does the series divide up its story?
There are four episodes on, respectively: rural life beyond the kailyard [kitchen garden]; nationalism and unionism; language and class; and city life. We had to really think about where we would start this story, and we chose Sir David Lyndsay's [1540 play] *Three Estates*, which was performed in front of the king. It's about egalitarianism in Scotland, and how the king could be better, how nobles are often venal and merchants grasping. We also brought the story right up to date and interviewed Douglas Stuart, who wrote [2020's] *Shuggie Bain*.

Does the series touch on the work of less familiar writers?
Absolutely. The Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland are often thought of as being very religious, both Presbyterian and Catholic, and quite repressive in years gone past. But we excavated Gaelic poetry and found it to be incredibly erotic – just dirty, some of it! – and written by women as well as men. Who knew?

Tell us a little about some of the contemporary crime novels that you chose, by writers such as Ian Rankin, Val McDermid and Louise Welsh.
We chose those books because they said something not only about the craft of crime writing, but also about Scotland and duality as well. This goes straight back to Robert Louis Stevenson's extraordinary *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or to James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Duality goes through Scottish literature. Rankin's detective Rebus and William McIlvanney's Laidlaw are dark characters: you aren't sure whether the cops are really good guys or not, they are very flawed. Crime writing is often dismissed as genre writing, but these are very, very good writers. H

Written in Scotland will air on BBC Radio 4 from Thursday 24 June and will also be available via BBC Sounds



A poster from a theatrical adaptation of Stevenson's 1886 *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which is among the books explored in Kirsty Wark's new series

HISTORY COOKBOOK

It's a little fiddly, but this homemade gnocchi is well worth the effort

TASTE

Gnocchi

Since arriving in Argentina with Italian immigrants in the 19th century, this dumpling-like classic has come to occupy such a central place in that nation's cuisine that the 29th of each month is known as "gnocchi day".

Difficulty: 3/10 / **Time:** Two hours

INGREDIENTS

700g mashed potato
120g flour
One egg yolk
A pinch of salt
One tablespoon vegetable oil

METHOD

Put the mashed potato in a bowl and add one egg yolk. Add vegetable oil and a pinch of salt, and mix by hand. Then add the flour. Knead the mixture in the bowl for about five minutes and add a little more flour, as needed, until the mixture has a soft, dough-like texture — not too sticky and not too hard or dry. It should have the same texture as the dough for white bread.

Divide the mixture into four and sprinkle some flour on top. Then roll out the first quarter of the mixture on to a floured work area, making a long, thin roll about one inch wide. Cut the roll into 1-inch-long pieces. Press your thumb slightly into each piece, rolling it down the back of a fork.

To cook, add salt and a drop of oil to a pot of boiling water. Drop in the gnocchi pieces, and when they rise to the top (after about a minute), scoop out. Serve with your favourite sauce.

Recipe adapted from foodrepublic.com/recipes/the-story-behind-gnocchi-day-in-argentina

WATCH

Written into history

It's 60 years since Ernest Hemingway killed himself at his home in Idaho. His name has become synonymous with the idea of the writer as macho hell-raiser and adventurer, tragic figure and indisputable "man's man".

And yet, as a new series from Ken Burns and Lynn Novick (*The Vietnam War*) explores, that's a partial representation of a complex, contradictory artist whose work, despite its pared-back, terse prose, repays repeated reading. Drawing on the writing of Hemingway and those who knew him – most notably his four wives – the series instead offers a nuanced picture without ever shying away from such difficult subjects as Hemingway's misogynistic behaviour, his battles with depression and his alcoholism.

It's also a portrait of a man who saw some of the key events of the 20th century at first hand. Working as a journalist, for example, he was present at the 1938 battle of the Ebro, the last republican stand of the Spanish Civil War and the 1944 liberation of Paris.

Hollywood actors Jeff Daniels and Meryl Streep lend their voices to Hemingway and the writer's third wife, war correspondent Martha Gellhorn.

Hemingway
BBC Four / Expected to air in late June

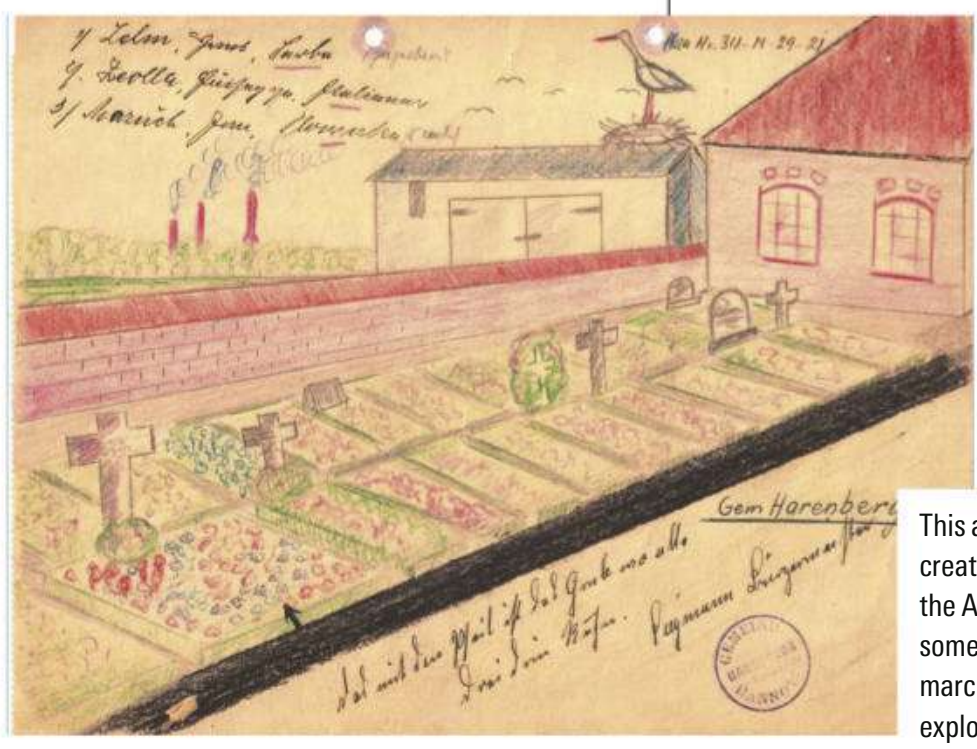
Ernest Hemingway (right) in 1944. A new series attempts to paint a rounded picture of the complex writer

VISIT

A brutal end

As the Second World War neared its conclusion, hundreds of thousands of people were moved from Nazi concentration camps and forced to travel across Europe – by road and rail, by ship and on foot. Of those, thousands died: massacred in group executions, shot for failing to keep up, or from illness and frailty after years of starvation and violence.

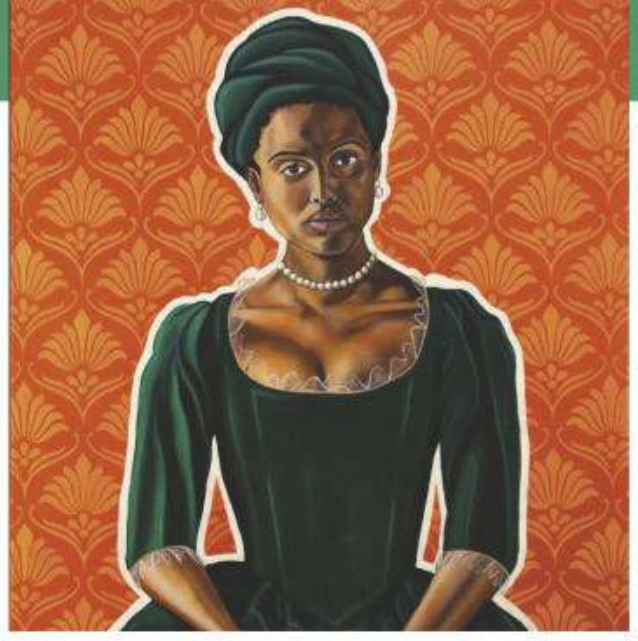
In a new exhibition, London's Weiner Holocaust Library examines these horrors, drawing on the testimonies of the small number of survivors, collected by its staff in the 1950s and 60s. The exhibition also looks at how researchers have gathered evidence about what has long been an understudied aspect of the Holocaust.



Death Marches: Evidence and Memory
The Wiener Holocaust Library, London / Until 27 August / Booking required / *wienerholocaustlibrary.org*

This annotated image was created after the war to help the Allies find the bodies of some victims of the Nazi death marches. A new exhibition explores their stories

ITS DIGITAL ARCHIVE, WIENER HOLOCAUST LIBRARY COLLECTIONS/GETTY IMAGES/SAM NOTT



VISIT

Depicting the diaspora

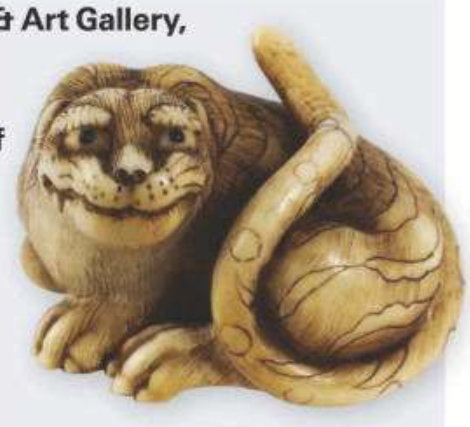
Highlighting the ties between English Heritage's historic properties and people with African roots, a new initiative sees specially commissioned portraits of six such individuals go on display at locations around the country. They include those of 18th-century heiress Dido Belle (above), at Kenwood House in London, and Queen Victoria's goddaughter Sarah Forbes Bonetta, whose portrait will be on display at Osborne, on the Isle of Wight.

Painting Our Past: The African Diaspora in England
Sites around England / 9June–5 November / Booking required / *english-heritage.org.uk/learn/painting-our-past*

VISIT

Miniature marvels

Ever wondered where Japanese men stored personal items while they were wearing kimono, which typically are devoid of pockets? The answer is on a series of silk cords, tucked in at a sash on the waist – and safely secured with *netsuke*, or tiny carved sculptures that acted as toggles. A selection of 75 such figurines – including the feline example below – will be available to view at an exhibition at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, which explores the skill of their production and the stories they tell.



Netsuke: Miniature Masterpieces from Japan
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery / Until June 2022 / Booking required / *bristolmuseums.org.uk*

LISTEN

Lost soul

In March 1918, poet and composer Ivor Gurney (above) suffered a breakdown. While he continued to work, it was a prelude to a period of instability that eventually resulted in his family having him committed to an asylum. Gurney, who experienced bouts of manic depression, spent the final 15 years of his life in institutions. He continued to write, but his haunting and troubling work was unperformed and unpublished.

A new radio documentary goes some way to making good this lack, as academic and broadcaster Kate Kennedy gains access to Gurney's hidden archives. Working with poet Andrew Motion and musicologist Stephen Johnson, she brings lost works by Gurney into the light, including previously unheard songs.

Sunday Feature: Unmouthed
BBC Radio 3 / Sunday 20 June

ENGLISH HERITAGE/TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM /BRIDGEMAN/MUSEE RODIN

VISIT

Moulding the future

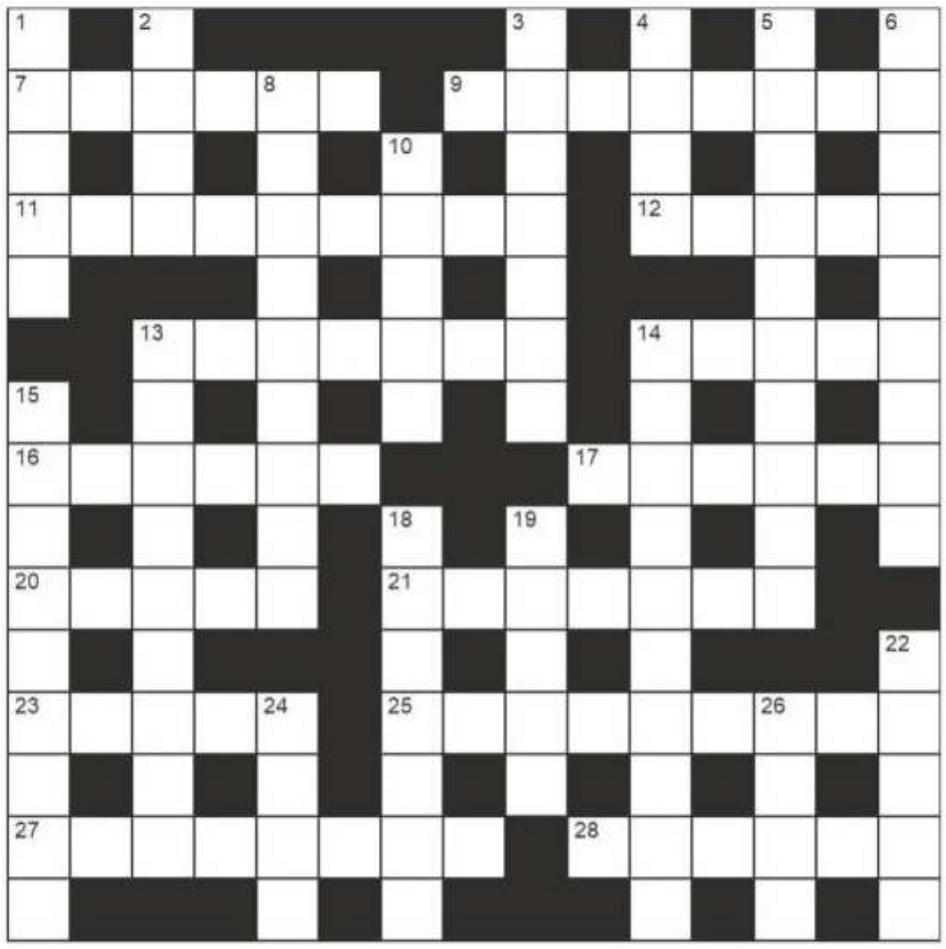
French sculptor Auguste Rodin's naturalistic, complex work brought him international renown in the late 19th century, with his pieces in marble and bronze receiving particular acclaim. However, a new Tate Modern exhibition is focusing on another medium just as crucial in the development of Rodin's iconoclastic style: plaster.

Aiming to evoke the atmosphere of an artist's studio, the exhibition explores how the sculptor's model-making and experimentation was key in his creative process. It also delves into the interpersonal dynamics of such an environment – Rodin, famously, had a complicated relationship with fellow sculptor, and lover, Camille Claudel. H

The Making of Rodin
Tate Modern, London / Until 21 November / Booking required / *tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-rodin*

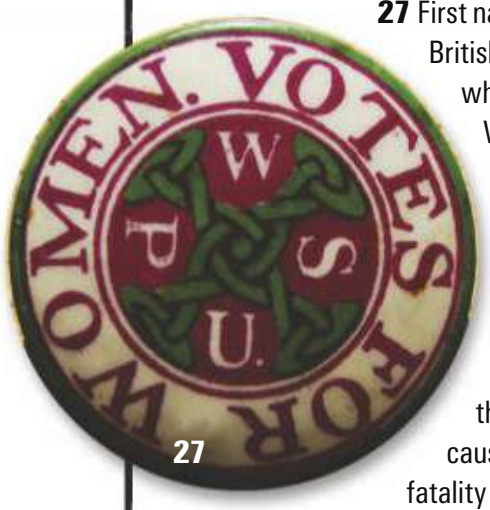
Auguste Rodin in his studio. A new exhibition explores how his working practices fuelled his creativity – and affected his relationships

PRIZE CROSSWORD



Across

7 The dictator of this African country was overthrown in 1979, after eight years of brutal misrule (6)
9 A professional musician or other entertainer in medieval Europe, attached to a court or, more likely, travelling widely (8)
11 This township, under siege by the Boers, along with Kimberley and Mafeking, was finally relieved by British forces in 1900 (9)
12 British social reformer, _____Besant, early advocate of birth control and campaigner for Indian independence (5)
13 Popular game, said to have been first played by British soldiers in 19th-century India, as a variation of the 15-ball "Pyramids" (7)
14 The only surviving child of Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII, who became the first queen to rule England in her own right (4,1)
16 Last name of 20th-century eccentric US millionaire. He was a manufacturer, aviator and film producer and director (6)
17 The region centred on what is now Nova Scotia, established by France in the 17th century (6)
20 Celebrated on 15 August 1945 in Britain, it marked victory over Japan and the end of the Second World War (2,3)
21 Member of the people who established the second or middle Babylonian dynasty (7)
23 Twice prime minister of Ireland, he oversaw the country's entry into the European Economic Community (5)
25 Youngest daughter of Nicholas II and Alexandra of Russia, whose most famous impostor (said to have survived the revolution) was "Anna Anderson" (9)
27 First name of the British suffragist who founded the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903 (8)
28 Up to the late 18th century, this was a major cause of disability/fatality in sailors (6)

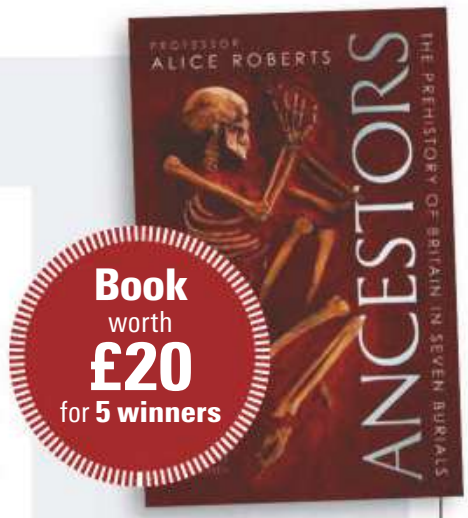


27

Down

1 Roman general who, after winning the first full-scale civil war in Roman history, revived the dictatorship (5)
2 Stephen _____, a key figure in the 1963 Profumo affair. Abandoned by his society friends during his trial for pimping, he killed himself (4)
3 George _____, Scottish religious reformer and martyr, burned at the stake for heresy in 1546 (7)
4 Located in south Wales, one of three permanent Roman legionary fortresses in Britain, along with Deva and Eboracum (4)
5 Shropshire location of Abraham Darby's revolutionary cast-iron construction, opened to traffic in 1781 (10)
6 Spanish site of a famous naval battle in 1801 and a 1906 conference to resolve the Moroccan crisis (9)
8 Purpose-built ship used by Scott for his 1901–04 Antarctic expedition (9)
10 Pen name of the German-born political cartoonist who portrayed Prime Minister Macmillan as "Supermac" (5)
13 The Roman fort at the eastern end of Hadrian's Wall (modern-day Wallsend, Tyne and Wear) (9)
14 Barbara _____, US scientist whose 1940s/50s work on genes (largely disregarded at the time) won her the Nobel prize in 1983 (10)
15 French title originally roughly equivalent to the English "knight" (9)
18 Former Soviet republic in which millions died in the "Great Famine" of 1932–33, victims of Soviet policy (7)
19 First name of one of history's greatest scientists, best known for formulating the "three laws of motion" (5)
22 Forest near Smolensk, scene of the mass murder of Polish officers by the Soviet Union in 1940 (5)
24 Octavia _____, British social reformer who co-founded Britain's National Trust in 1895 (4)
26 A type of worker in the feudal system whose freedom of movement was restricted (4)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



Book worth **£20** for **5 winners**

Ancestors: A Prehistory of Britain in Seven Burials

By Professor Alice Roberts

In her latest book, Professor Alice Roberts explores what we can learn about the lives of the very earliest Britons – from their burial sites. Their fascinating stories are told through the bones and funerary offerings they left behind. (Read our interview with Alice on page 78.)

HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to ***BBC History Magazine*, July 2021 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA** or email them to ***july2021@historycomps.co.uk*** by 5pm on **7 July 2021**. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the September 2021 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at *immediatemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy/privacy/* ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ❑ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: *bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct*

Solution to our May 2021 crossword

Across 1 Vortigern 6 Junta 10 Athens 11 Garrick 12 Rand 13 Amy Johnson 14 Gordon 15 Serfdom 17/19 Peacock Throne 21 Demetrius 24 Sack 26/7 Western Union 27 Aragon 28 Arles 29 Palestine.
Down 2 Ostia 3 Theodoric 4 Gestapo 5 Rugby 8 Tokyo Rose 9 Creole 14 Glendower 16 Froissart 18 Cutler 20 Hostage 22 Moshe 23 Ionia 25 Crown

Five winners of *Barbarossa: How Hitler Lost the War*:
N Porter, Oxfordshire; J Traynor, Cheshire; R Gillard, Worcestershire; P Smith, Chislehurst; G Currie, Greater Manchester

CROSSWORD COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS

● The crossword competition is open to all residents of the UK (& Channel Islands), aged 18 or over, except Immediate Media Company London Limited employees or contractors, and anyone connected with the competition or their direct family members. By entering, participants agree to be bound by these terms and conditions and that their name and county may be released if they win. Only one entry permitted per person. ● The closing date and time is as shown under How to Enter, above. Entries received after that will not be considered. Entries cannot be returned. Entrants must supply full name, address and daytime phone number. Immediate Media Company (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will not publish your personal details or provide them to anyone without permission. Read more about the Immediate Privacy Policy at *immediatemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy/* ● The winning entrants will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. The prize and number of winners will be as shown on the Crossword page. There is no cash alternative and the prize will not be transferable. Immediate Media Company London Limited's decision is final and no correspondence relating to the competition will be entered into. The winners will be notified by post within 20 days of the close of the competition. The name and county of residence of the winners will be published in the magazine within two months of the closing date. If the winner is unable to be contacted within one month of the closing date, Immediate Media Company London Limited reserves the right to offer the prize to a runner-up. ● Immediate Media Company London Limited reserves the right to amend these terms and conditions, or to cancel, alter or amend the promotion at any stage, if deemed necessary in its opinion, or if circumstances arise outside of its control. The promotion is subject to the laws of England.

MARY EVANS

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A selection of the exciting content on our website **historyextra.com**

Outlander: the history that inspired the drama

The drama series *Outlander*, based on a series of novels by Diana Gabaldon, has become a TV phenomenon and much of the story is rooted in historical fact. Madeleine Pelling and Rosie Waine explore the real 18th-century events portrayed in the programme. ***historyextra.com/outlander***

Shakespeare guide

William Shakespeare lived through one of the most turbulent yet thrilling eras of English history, and went on to become the world's best known playwright. He has been portrayed numerous times on stage and on screen – but how much do you know about England's bard?
historyextra.com/shakespeare

George V facts

Born during the reign of Queen Victoria, the young George V was never intended to end up on the throne. In this piece, Alexandra Churchill reveals everything you need to know about the founder of the House of Windsor – from how he became king, to the cause of his death in 1936.
historyextra.com/george-v

Newsletters

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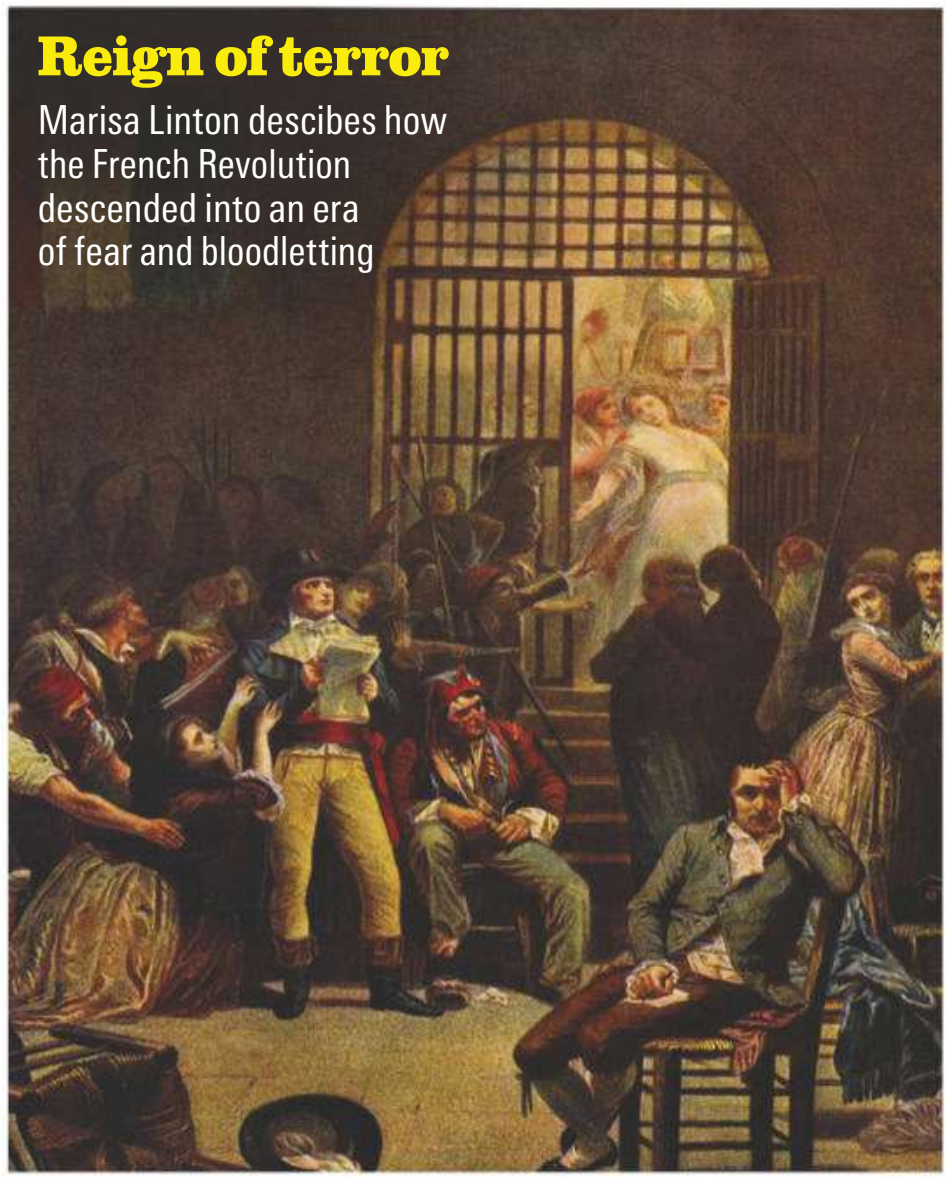
August issue on sale 8 July 2021

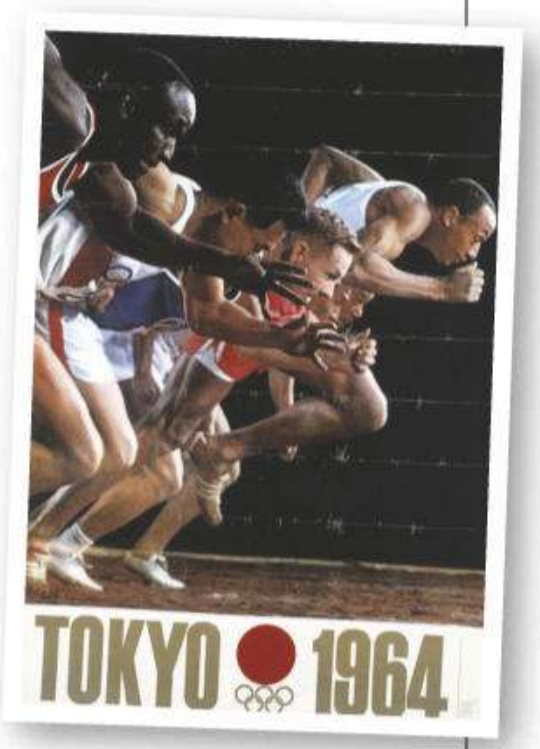


Reign of terror

Marisa Linton descibes how the French Revolution descended into an era of fear and bloodletting

Gender pain gap

From hysteria to "womb fury", Elinor Cleghorn explores how women have been medically misunderstood over time



Tokyo Olympics

Christopher Harding revisits the games of 1964 – the first to ever be held in Asia

History of sex

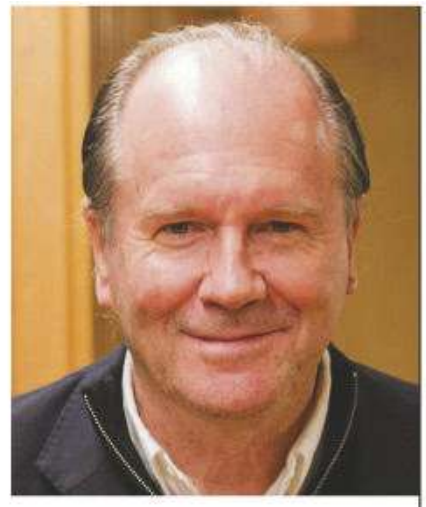
Fern Riddell on the ways societies have explored sexuality over the centuries

MY HISTORY HERO

*Novelist **William Boyd** chooses*

Anton Chekhov

1860–1904



William Boyd is one of Britain's best-known contemporary novelists. His latest book, *Trio* (Viking), is out now

A colourised portrait of Anton Chekhov, from 1901. Plagued by ill-health for most of his life, he was a prolific writer, dedicated doctor and serial womaniser

IN PROFILE

Anton Chekhov was a Russian short story writer and playwright. Widely considered among the greatest ever short story writers, he is best known in the west for his four classic plays – *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* – which are still regularly performed on stage. A qualified physician, he died of tuberculosis at the age of just 44.

> His short stories were all written in the late 19th century, but they're so modern in spirit they could have been written yesterday

When did you first hear about Chekhov? My first Chekhov "Road to Damascus" moment was when I saw a TV adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* on the BBC with Judi Dench in my late twenties. The scales fell from my eyes, and I've been swimming in a Chekhovian sea ever since.

What kind of man was he? He trained to be a doctor and in effect supported his family – two of his brothers were alcoholics – as a doctor and writer, penning pieces for newspapers. Sadly, at the age of 24 he had his first major haemorrhage from tuberculosis. Being a doctor, he knew he wasn't going to live a long life and indeed died at just 44 – I think that's what helped to make his writing so clear-eyed and unsentimental. He also had a pretty extraordinary sex life and often had more than one lover at a time.

What made Chekhov a hero? The short stories are the key thing for me. His great stories were all written in the late 19th century, but they're so modern in spirit they could have been written yesterday. He has a contemporary view of the human condition and that's what made him so unusual for the time: he's a man without faith, and sees life as an absurd tragicomedy.

What was Chekhov's finest hour? The publication of his collected works in Russia while he was still alive. He sold the rights for as much money as possible so as to be able to support his family – and that was the apotheosis of his artistic life. But he was still a doctor, and he built schools, nursed people through cholera epidemics and took an extraordinary trip to the prison island of Sakhalin in the Russian far east, exposing the suffering and turmoil of the prisoners.

Is there anything you don't particularly admire about him? I've never quite understood how he could be friends with the violently anti-Semitic publisher Aleksey Suvorin – a monster of a man who was to the right of Genghis Khan – particularly as Chekhov himself was a liberal. There is no doubt that he [Chekhov] also behaved badly to the many women who loved him. He was a commitment-phobe: as soon as a woman wanted to marry him, he moved on to the next one. [However, he did wed actress Olga Knipper three years before his death.]

Can you see any parallels between Chekhov's life and your own? I think we shared a similar world view, and I've written a play based on two of his short stories. But he's nothing like me in my personal life – I've been happily married for decades! I think the ticking clock of his approaching mortality explains a lot of his behaviour as it grew louder and louder. H

William Boyd was talking to York Membery

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